GYPSY'S PROPHECY

14—

Miss Deafah Jones.

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THE GIPSY'S PROPHECY

BY

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THE GIPSY'S PROPHECY.

CHAPTER I.

Down by the hazel copse at evening blazed
The gypsy's fagot—there we stood and gazed;
Gazed at her sunburnt face with silent awe!
Her tattered mantle and her hood of straw;
Her moving lips, her cauldron brimming o'er;
The drowsy brood that on her back she bore,
Imps in the barn, with mousing owlet bred,
From rifled roost at nightly revel fed;
Where dark eyes flashed through locks of blackest shade,
When in the breeze the distant watch-dog bayed;
And heroes fled the Sibyl's muttered call,
Whose elfin prowess scaled the orchard wall.
As o'er my palm the silver piece she drew,
And traced the line of life with searching view,
How throbbed my fluttering pulse with hopes and fears,
To learn the color of my future years!—ROGERS.

It is the Derby day—the great carnival of Protestant England; the saturnalia of free-born Britons; when the village of Epsom is, for the time, elevated into supreme importance above all other villages, towns, and cities; when London, Paris and St. Petersburg are nothing and nowhere, and Epsom is all and all—the capital of England, the metropolis of the world, the center of the solar system, the centripetal power of all animated nature, and of all civilized life, attracting all surrounding creation with irresistible force to itself.

It is the day when horse jockeys are mightier than monarchs, and horses a higher order of being than man;

when all questions of merely human or national interest are crowded out by the one all-engrossing subject of thought and conversation; when our relations with France, the condition of India, the income-tax, the change of ministry, are the merest trifles beside the absorbing question of:

"Who is to win the Derby?"

Epsom Heath, on the Derby day, is a scene impossible to conceive by those who have never seen it.

It is a concentrated quintessence of the world with all its passions and objects, its hopes and fears, its loves and hatreds, its jealousies and rivalries, its joys and sorrows, its disappointments and triumphs.

It is a vast collection of all that is most exciting and most depressing, most delightful and most distressing in civilized life.

Here are brought together all ranks, from that of royalty down through every intermediate grade, to the beggar who wanders listlessly about, scarcely hoping to gather from this joyous crowd, the poor boon of a penny or a crust.

The hill is covered with hundreds of open barouches, filled with splendidly-attired ladies and gentlemen, all in gay conversation and eager anticipation of the great race of the day. All the heath, between the hill and the race-course, is mottled over with vehicles of every possible description, from the brougham of the gentleman to the donkey-cart of the costermonger, and with booths, and apple stalls, gypsy tents and professors of every art and imposition, from thimble rig to fortune telling. But the most exciting object of the whole scene is the grand-stand where the bettors are making up their books—where those haggard men who stake their whole fortune upon the wind and limb of untried horses, know that in another hour they must be enriched or ruined.

Outside the race course the ground for miles around is still covered with a vast concourse of men, women and children, horses, dogs and donkeys, carriages, carts and wagons, booths, stalls and tents.

Beyond this outer circle, every leading highway is thronged miles deep with more men, women, and children, more horses, dogs, and donkeys, and more carriages, carts, and wagons, all pressing on toward the scene of action, all blockading each other at the turnpike-gates, and cheering or swearing at each other as they crush past.

On one of the best front sites upon this hill, and between two coroneted carriages, stood a large, clean, substantial brake, a thing much more convenient for its present purpose than any other sort of carriage could possibly be.

This brake was occupied by a family party which seemed to consist of a father and four handsome daughters, but was in reality a bachelor uncle and four nieces.

Three of these were large, blonde girls, showily dressed and full of talk and laughter.

The fourth was smaller and darker, of a more elegant figure and plainer garb. She sat beside her uncle on the back seat, and while her companions chattered and giggled with girlish gayety, she surveyed the scene around her with grave thoughtfulness.

The old man, after roaring aloud at some flippant speech of one of the young ladies, suddenly turned to his silent niece, and said:

"Well, my dear Constance, what do you think of the Derby, eh? How serious you are! I hope those highly respectable old ladies at Brussels haven't turned you into a sort of Protestant nun, have they? You don't answer. Come, what do you think of the Derby, eh?"

"In truth, more than I can tell you at once, uncle," replied the young girl.

"Gay, dashing, inspiring scene, isn't it, eh? Can't be beat in the world—the Derby. But come, we must have lunch. What the deuce are we waiting for, girls?"

"For Lord Starr and Captain Starr, who promised to join us, you know, uncle," said the eldest Miss Horton.

"Oh, yes, to be sure; where can they be? at the betting-ring, I do suppose, deep in their betting-books; no, by Jove, here they come, the captain with the trophies of Aunt Sally adorning his hat. David, you villain! David, you lazy loon, where are you? Come, serve up! serve up!"

The "lazy loon" thus adjured, came forward from behind the brake, bearing aloft a huge hamper, which he deposited within the vehicle before his master.

The hamper was speedily unpacked of its contents, consisting of provisions enough to dine a large party sumptuously; for Colonel North always came provided to lunch at least half-a-dozen bachelor friends in addition to his own circle.

As the viands were taken out and deposited about as the capabilities of the roomy brake permitted, two gentlemen walked up, and, lifting their hats, saluted our party.

The elder, a tall, fine-looking man of fifty, was cordially greeted by the colonel and the three young ladies, and then formally presented to Constance as:

"Lord Starr, of Starr Court, in Hampshire."

Lord Starr bowed profoundly.

Constance half arose and slightly curtsied.

"This, I may say, is my niece Constance's debut in the world! Singular scene for a young lady's first appearance! but the fact is I have just brought her from her school in Brussels, where she has been passing the

last five years; and I thought before taking her home to Llyndell, I would just stop a day or two in London to bring her to the Derby. I telegraphed for her cousins to join us, and here they are, and here we are," said Colonel North, jovially.

Lord Starr bowed again, and expressed his satisfaction in making her acquaintance.

The younger man was presented as:

"Captain Starr, of the Horse Guards."

"Come in, come in, gentlemen! there is plenty of room in our brake; in which matter it has a decided advantage over the finer-looking carriages around us. Come in; it is ill standing to feed!" said the colonel, heartily.

The conversation of course turned upon the prospective winning horse, and equally of course every one knew which that was to be—the favorite, "Annihilator," and no other.

Every one agreed to this; that is, every one except Miss Fanny Horton, who, as she picked a pigeon wing, laid down the law as follows:

"Well! I am not learned in horsey lore, as you gentlemen of the turf are expected to be, but this one thing I have noticed in my last ten years' annual visits to the Derby——"

But Miss Fanny's sentence was never finished, for just at this moment a universal excitement moved the vast multitude, as the wind moves the leaves of a great forest, and the words went around:

"They are about to start!" repeated at the same instant by many thousand voices.

Every one stood up in breathless excitement.

All necks were stretched, and all eyes turned toward the starting point.

Another instant and a cry went up from that great multitude:

"They're off! They're off!"

And they are off—some twenty or thirty horses—the best of all three-year-old colts in the whole civilized world! They come! They come! they rush on! urged by their jockeys in green caps, red caps, yellow caps, blue caps, all caps!

Oh, Heaven! what an interval of thrilling suspense! Fifty thousand people are on their feet, breathless, eager, expectant!

There, on the grand stand, are men who have staked their all upon this race, with faces like those of maniacs—pale, haggard, anxious, agonized—another minute will enrich or ruin them.

Not a word is spoken amid the breathless multitude.

The horses rush on and on, like a whirlwind, sublime in their irresistible might!

And now the breathless silence is broken by shouts of "Annihilator's ahead!"

"Invincible's past him!"

"Fleetfoot is first!"

"Whose horse won? What was the name of the winning horse?" was the next question heard all over the ground. Every one referred to their card, but no one could tell until the figure was up. Then the ten thousand voices exclaimed at once:

"Mr. Jones' Muff! Who would have thought it?"

The great interest of the day was over; but there were some two or three minor races to be run, and people were too much excited to go home; so, though the royal party withdrew, the multitude remained to see it all out.

Lord Starr and Captain Starr, lifting their hats, bade adieu to our party, and departed to see how their friends of the betting-ring were sustaining their misfortunes or triumphs; and Colonel North was left alone with his nieces.

Meanwhile Constance, whose feelings had been profoundly moved by all that she had seen and heard, sat back in deep thought, that was at length interrupted by a well-modulated voice, close to her ear, saying:

"Tell your fortune, sweet lady?"

Constance started, and looked up to behold at her elbow one of those gypsy crones that infest all public gatherings to pick up silver by telling fortunes.

She flung some coins, then held out her hand, saying:

"There, read what you find there."

The gypsy took and carefully scrutinized the palm exposed to her view; and as she gazed upon it, her own dark and eloquent face became convulsed as by some agonizing emotion. She dropped the hand of the girl, and gazed mournfully into her face.

"Well," said Constance, "what do you read?"

"Lady, I cannot, dare not read aloud the awful lines that Fate has written on your hand," said the gypsy, gazing fixedly upon the face of her whom she had now completely magnetized.

"Gypsy," said Constance, bending forward, and speaking in a low, breathless tone, "I know not how much or how little you may really possess of that awful gift you claim, but I am now willing to test it. Gypsy, all my life I have been haunted by one dark presentiment. Tell me, what form does my presentiment take?"

The gypsy bent and whispered in her ear one word.

Constance started and turned deadly pale.

"Now do you believe in my gift?" inquired the sibyl.

"I know not what to believe. But tell me, will my fatal presentiment be fulfilled?"

"It depends upon yourself."

"Upon myself?"

"Yes; Fate is never so absolute but that she leaves an alternative to her victim."

"Explain. How may I avoid the fulfillment of my dark presentiment?"

"Love not!"

"Love not?"

"Love never! Choose the half-life of perpetual maidenhood; so shall that half-life flow on calmly if not happily to its bourne in the ocean of eternity. But if, on the other hand, you love——"

"Well?"

"You will be loved again! passionately! devotedly! without measure!"

"Surely that would be a happy fate. What next?"

"You will be wedded to him whom you love and by whom you are beloved."

"A happier fate. What next?"

"You would be a bride; but——"

"Well?"

"Never a wife!——"

"Ah!"

"For between the nuptial benediction and the bridal chamber shall arise the dark form of the—scaffold!"

A half-suppressed shriek burst from the lips of Constance; but controlling her emotions, she bade the sybil proceed.

"Lady, I have but little more to say; I have read the future for you, and I have shown you the alternatives of fate; choose for yourself. A few days will decide your destiny. A few days will show whether your life is to be a long and calm monotony, or whether it is to be a brief fever, lightened by transient joy, and darkened by fatal sorrow! A few days and a stranger, who is not quite a stranger, will cross your path. Lady! if you would have long and tranquil days, speak not to him; look not on him; turn your back upon him; fly as for life, and fling not a glance behind!"

And so saying, the gypsy glided away. Colonel North, who had meanwhile been busy making up the sweepstakes for the next race, now turned and called upon Constance to stake her sovereign, and draw her number.

Constance mechanically declined, for her thoughts were, despite her reason, engaged with the gypsy's prophecy.

And after the next race, in which Colonel North won the sweepstakes, the party left the race course, and by slow stages, through crowded and noisy highways, proceeded to London, where, over a comfortable supper at their hotel, they forgot the fatigues of the road.

And the next morning the whole party left town for Wales.

CHAPTER II.

He had a kindred being sought,
Had searched with restless care,
For that true, earnest woman soul,
Among the bright and fair.
He could not rest, he felt for him
One such his God created,
Whose maiden soul in quietude
On his call meekly waited.

—E. OAKES SMITH.

The locality of our story lies amid one of the wildest and most picturesque regions of South Wales, where the head waters of the Rhai River rise amid the Oloff Hills.

The precise spot, Crucis, is a sublime and beautiful scene, where two wooded ranges of hills cross each other at oblique angles.

At the intersecting point of these ridges stands a little ancient chapel, called St. Andrew's Church, and around the chapel nestles a little hamlet, named, from its elevated position, Bleakton.

At the period at which our story opens, the four estates, in the four angles of the irregular mountain cross, were owned as follows:

The eastern one, called Llyndell, was the life property of Mrs. Horton, a lady of the old school.

The western, and most valuable one, was the inheritance of Miss Wynne, an orphan heiress, granddaughter and ward of Mrs. Horton.

The northern and smallest one, called, from being the deepest vale of the four, Horne's Hole, was the property of old Hugh Horne, a widower of gloomy temper, parsimonious habits and almost fabulous wealth.

The southern one, named, from the extravagant cost of the elegant mansion house, elaborate outbuildings and highly-ornamented grounds, which had absorbed the means of the late owner, "Radnor's Ruins," was the heavily-mortgaged patrimony of Gerald Ross Mostyn, the grandson of Mr. Horne, and now a young aspirant for honors at the University of Oxford.

But little benefit to the heir was to be hoped from the inheritance of his father's burdened property. In the first place, old Hugh Horne had bought up in his own name all the claims against the estate of Radnor's Ruin, doubtless to prevent a foreclosure, and to save the property for his grandson.

But, unhappily, Gerald had mortally offended the despotic old man, by declining an agricultural life, and persisting in the study of a profession—a course that had resulted in his own disinheritance.

To make this punishment more bitter to his grandson, the old man had taken into favor his nephew, Mr. James Horne, whom he had established near himself at Radnor's Ruin.

At this time, the disinherited heir, having finished a term at the university, had come down to spend a part of his vacation in his native place.

As no hospitable mansion was likely to be thrown open to the almost penniless young student, he also received "his warmest welcome in an inn."

It was upon the Saturday evening of his arrival that he found the little hotel, and, indeed, the whole village of Bleakton, in a great state of excitement, from the fact that the celebrated heiress, Miss Wynne, had just stopped there, and had passed through on her way home.

Gerald had known her as a child; but that was years ago, and her very form and features had passed from his memory.

The next morning being the Sabbath, Gerald Mostyn walked from Bleakton to Llyndell, to attend service at Christ Church, in the parish of Crucis.

Occupying the large pew immediately before the pulpit were the Hortons. Gerald was given a seat at the right hand of the pulpit, from which he had a full view of this party.

In the end nearest to him sat three gayly-attired and blooming girls, whose hoops, crinolines and ample skirts filled the whole space. These young women he easily identified as the Horton ladies. He narrowly scrutinized them, to see if he could discover which was the great heiress, Miss Wynne.

With a strong family likeness among them, it was difficult to distinguish the heiress, Miss Wynne, from her cousins, the Misses Horton. But at length Gerald fixed upon the one at the upper end of the pew as Miss Wynne. He came to the opinion in this manner: First, because her form was taller and rounder, her skin whiter, her cheeks pinker, her eyes bluer and her curls yellower than those of her companions; secondly, because her dress had more flounces and her bonnet more flowers than anybody else's; thirdly, because she occupied the place of honor at the upper end of the pew!

In the next pew sat the old lady, Mrs. Horton, in the black silk gown, mantle and bonnet that had been her Sunday dress for the last forty years. By her side was her old bachelor brother, Colonel North. And, near the door of the pew, sat a young female, plainly dressed, whom Gerald Mostyn had not yet particularly noticed, because she sat farthest from him, and held her head down, following the minister from the open hymn book that lay upon her lap.

The minister finished the reading of the hymn, and the

organist commenced playing the prelude. The congregation arose to sing.

As Gerald Mostyn stood up his eyes fell full upon the young girl at the lower end of Mrs. Horton's pew.

And from that moment he saw no one else in the church!

Was it merely love at first sight? Was it the spirit's recognition? What was it?

In this plainly-dressed young woman, this maid or humble companion of Mrs. Horton, he had found his ideal.

She was clothed with classic simplicity; a gray silk dress and a plain straw bonnet with white strings were the external items of her costume. She might be the seamstress of the young ladies, or the humble companion of the aged matron. Her dress revealed nothing except the good taste of the wearer; for the wealthiest heiress could find nothing prettier, nor the poorest governess anything cheaper for her Sunday wear than this gray silk gown and straw bonnet. Gerald Mostyn made up his own mind: first, that he loved her; secondly, that she was Mrs. Horton's companion; thirdly, that he would seek her acquaintance, with the ultimate view, perhaps, of making her his wife.

When service was over, Gerald went out with the rest, and watched to see what would become of the girl who seemed already to hold his fate in the hollow of her little hand.

When the Horton family reached the churchyard they filed off in pairs, to walk the short distance between Christ Church and Llyndell manor-house. The two sisters went arm-in-arm; the young belle, whom he took to be Miss Wynne, walked with Colonel North, and the unknown girl supported the feeble steps of Mrs. Horton.

Gerald watched until the party had passed out of sight

up the wood-path that led them toward their home. Then he turned to notice that everybody had left the church premises except himself and the young clergyman, who seemed waiting to speak to him.

"You seem to be a stranger here, sir," said the latter, approaching him.

"A stranger in my native place, then, sir; but I have been absent many years, and times and acquaintances have changed. You, I believe, are one of the newcomers?" said Gerald.

"I am William Osborne, sir, pastor of Christ Church parish, at your service."

Gerald bowed, replying:

"And I, reverend sir, am Gerald Mostyn, late of Radnor, at yours."

"I am happy to know you, Mr. Mostyn. And now, sir, without further ceremony, if you have no more agreeable destination, I should be happy to have you return home and dine with me."

Now, it had been Gerald's first intention to return to his inn; but the temptation to stay and attend afternoon service, in the hope of again seeing that noble girl, was strong within him.

After a moment's reflection, he frankly accepted the minister's invitation, and accompanied him to the parsonage, a pretty cottage, in a well-cultivated garden, a few rods off from the church. Here he was presented to Mr. Osborne's young wife, a pretty little dark-haired woman, who made him quite welcome.

In the course of the dinner it had several times occurred to Gerald to speak of the unknown girl, and inquire her name and history; but ever a deeply respectful regard for her kept him silent.

At the hour for the afternoon service, he returned

with Mr. and Mrs. Osborne to church. He went to the same pew he had occupied in the forenoon.

The church was by two-thirds not so well filled as in the morning—there are so few people who assist at afternoon service. None of the Horton family was present, and a feeling of deep disappointment was beginning to manifest itself, as he vainly watched the door and eagerly examined every new arrival.

At last the desired of his eyes appeared. How his heart rebounded at sight of her! She came gravely up the aisle, and took her place in the seat she had occupied in the morning.

Not only in the pew in which she sat, but in the whole front line of pews, she was the only person; yet in her rapt devotion she seemed unconscious of, or indifferent to, this circumstance. Her manner was more than grave and reverential—it was serious, earnest, fervent, yet without a shade of sanctimoniousness or asceticism.

Gerald Mostyn was spellbound to the contemplation of the soul's beauty irradiating her sweet and noble countenance.

Now, whether there was anything in his overt and respectful, though fixed, regards to magnetize the subject, I do not know; but suddenly she lifted her eyelids, and met his gaze! The sudden glances of those large and brilliant dark-gray eyes thrilled his soul with a deep, strange, painful joy. He colored like a detected trespasser, and fixed his eyes upon his book.

And when, a few minutes afterward, he stole a glance at her face, he noticed, with peculiar pleasure, that her eyes were cast down, and her pale cheeks delicately flushed. How his heart beat! What a magnetic girl was this, that the glance of her eye, the dropping of her eyelashes, the flushing of her cheek, had power to thrill and agitate his whole frame, as by a charge of electricity!

When the services were over, and the congregation dispersed, Gerald Mostyn found that the desired of his eyes and heart had disappeared among the crowd. In vain he sought her everywhere; she had vanished! And while he was still seeking her, the people were scattering and hurrying away to their several homes, to escape the storm that was seen to be gathering in the west. And before he had thought to follow their example, his shoulder was touched by a friendly hand, and, turning round, he saw Mr. Osborne by his side.

"You cannot possibly get home before the storm bursts; it is beginning to rain already, and hark to that thunder! You will have to come under my umbrella and walk home with me, to take refuge at the parsonage," said the minister.

Gerald Mostyn bowed and looked up at the sky.

From north to south, all along the western horizon, extended a great black cloud, with lurid, copper-colored edges, like smoke and fire. Muttering thunder and large, single drops of rain warned him that the storm was about to burst.

"I think, sir, I shall be compelled to accept your obliging offer," replied Gerald, smiling.

"Come on, then, sir! There is no time to lose in compliments," answered the minister, hoisting his large, tent-like umbrella, and offering his arm to his invited guest.

With a bow of thanks Gerald came under the shelter, and they took their way toward the parsonage.

Now, then, was an opportunity of learning the name and circumstances of the unknown girl. But the rain was now falling fast, the wind was blowing, the path was rough, and conversation was difficult, so Gerald, with an epicurean's taste, deferred the luxury of hearing of his beloved until he could enjoy it under the shelter of Mr. Osborne's pretty cottage roof.

CHAPTER III.

She is a queen of noble nature's crowning,
A smile of hers is like an act of grace;
For when she smiles a light is on her face
Of peaceful radiance, silvering o'er the stream
Of human thought with a pervading glory,
Not all a waking truth, nor all a dream—
A visitation bright and transitory.

—HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

They got into the parsonage before the storm fully burst. Mr. Osborne opened the left side-door and showed his guest into the parlor.

The room was empty.

"Where is your mistress, Peggy?" inquired the pastor of the little servant girl who came to take his hat and umbrella.

"Missus has gone upstairs, sir, with Miss Wynne," replied Peggy.

"Miss Wynne! She here?" exclaimed the minister, in surprise.

"Yes, master. She ran in here out of the rain, and went upstairs long ago to take off her bonnet."

As they entered the parlor, Mrs. Osborne sprang up and hastened to meet and welcome her unexpected guest.

But even while she was shaking hands with him, and he was politely expressing the pleasure he felt in being thus forced to take up his quarters at the parsonage for the evening, he caught a glimpse of another figure seated by the window, the sight of whom made his heart bound and his brain reel. And while the scene was still swimming before him, and while he still believed that image to be an optical delusion—the creature of his own fancy—

Mrs. Osborne led him up to the figure, and said, with a prettily simulated formality:

"Miss Wynne, permit me to present to you Mr. Mostyn. Mr. Mostyn, Miss Wynne;" and before Gerald had time to recover from his astonishment, the unknown girl, unknown now no longer, arose and placed her hand in his, and said, with the sweetest smile, and in the sweetest tones:

"I am very happy to meet you, sir. I have not forgotten my old, old playmate, although Mr. Mostyn has evidently forgotten Constance Wynne!"

Gerald Mostyn bowed deeply over the hand she had given him, and as he respectfully resigned it, and placed himself at her side, he replied:

"Miss Wynne possesses a better memory for acquaintances than the prosperous usually possess for those less favored by fortune."

"Fortune? She is a heathen goddess. I do not fall down and worship her," answered Constance, with sweet dignity.

Some foreheads look like thrones!

Hers looked such an one now!

Gerald bowed in deference to her remark. He could as yet scarcely trust himself to speak again. A host of bewildering impressions crowded upon him.

Here before him was the ideal of his soul—the desired of his heart—the delight of his eyes! alas, no equal of his own in adverse fortune! No daughter of the people was she, whom he could ask to toil, struggling beside him, up life's steep and rugged ascent; but the great, moneyed celebrity of the county—the great, landed heiress, to whose lofty alliance only men of the highest rank, fortune and distinction might dare to aspire.

And for him, a poor student, to pretend to the hand of Miss Wynne would seem presumptuous, mercenary,

mad! Memory was busy, also, traveling backward through the past to pause upon the one bright morn when, at a May-day festival, he had danced with Constance. She was then a child of six years of age, he a boy of twelve. Yet she had remembered him, while he had totally forgotten her; but that was natural, for doubtless he had changed less in features than she had.

Before it became absolutely necessary for him to force himself to speak again, they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and Francis Heath, the brother of the latter, a dark-haired and dark-eyed young man, with a highly intellectual and somewhat melancholy expression of countenance, and grave and thoughtful manners and conversation. Every one said, one even more adapted than his brother to the discharge of a clergyman's duties.

Mr. Osborne brought him up to the group; and after both gentlemen had paid their respects to Miss Wynne, the former presented the latter to his guest, in the following style:

"Mr. Mostyn, allow me to introduce to your favorable notice my brother-in-law, a young student of medicine under Dr. James Horne."

Gerald arose, bowed, and sat down again, in augmented bitterness of spirit. He had recognized in Mr. Heath the young gentleman who, at the village inn, had spoken with so much enthusiasm of Miss Wynne. He saw him take a seat on her other side, and at once, with the air of an old friend, enter into conversation with her. And the pangs of jealousy were added to those of desponding love. To make matters worse, Mr. Osborne drew him into discourse, so that he could no longer have the tantalizing pleasure of listening to her voice in *tête-à-tête* with his supposed rival.

Did his countenance betray his feelings, and did she perceive it?

He was almost tempted to believe so, for through his covert glances he noticed that her eyes were turned toward him; and at last, in meeting her eyes, she slightly flushed; and soon after, with a bow and a smile, she terminated her *tête-à-tête,* and, moving around, addressed a remark to Mr. Osborne which opened a discussion through which the conversation became general.

It was now that the light of her glorious soul beamed forth.

The subject under debate was the indisputable prevalence of social evil, and the inefficiency of legal statutes to prevent crime. The prison systems, with their doubtful tendencies, were considered. Capital punishment and the recently-started question of its abolishment were discussed.

Mr. and Mrs. Osborne took the cautious, conservative view.

Miss Wynne assumed a more enlightened, liberal and humane position, and voiced her opinions with rare perspicacity.

"Miss Wynne has a very vital interest in having the death penalty abolished," said Mr. Osborne, with a light laugh.

But to the astonishment of Gerald, Constance turned deadly pale, compressed her lips, and clenched her hands, as if compelling down some rising and almost overwhelming emotion.

Gerald, guessing that the minister had somehow made an unlucky speech, hastened to do away its effects by laughingly saying:

"I also take an especial personal interest in having capital punishment abolished. Miss Wynne, do you believe in astrology?"

Constance started, fixed her eyes intently upon the questioner, and then withdrawing them, answered:

"I do not know. 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.' If we are to place confidence in history, there are many recorded testimonies to the truth of astrology. And I do not reject a science or a theory because I do not understand it."

"When you hear Miss Wynne talk in that style, I would simply remind you that the great Dr. Johnson believed in ghosts!" said Mr. Osborne.

Without heeding this remark, Miss Wynne turned to Gerald, and said:

"Sir, why did you ask me if I believed in astrology?"

"Because, Miss Wynne, I was about to relate for your amusement a prediction that was made concerning myself by a professor of that black art."

"A prediction!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne.

"Yes, sir," replied Gerald, smiling, "a prediction which, if I believed, would certainly not dispose me to favor the abolishment of the death penalty."

Constance was listening, her chin resting upon her hand, her eyes fixed upon his face, in earnest attention.

"Miss Wynne, you do not probably recollect the Egyptian Dervis, Achbad, who some years ago, attended by an interpreter, traveled through the country, casting horoscopes, exposing the past, revealing the present, and predicting the future?"

"Oh, yes! I do!" exclaimed Constance, in a low and thrilling tone, that caused Gerald to look from her to her friends in surprise and inquiry. "But go on with your story, Mr. Mostyn," she continued, without relaxing her fixed and almost painful attention.

CHAPTER IV.

Listen, gentle lady, now,
Awful hands have marked my brow.

"My story," replied Gerald Mostyn, "is short, but very singular. Three years since, while I was sojourning for a short time in the town of Brighton, before going to the university, I chanced to hear of the Egyptian Dervis, Achbad, who was at that time creating quite a sensation there. His wonderful reputation was the theme of every tongue.

"Idleness and curiosity combined to lead me to his rooms, which were situated in the fourth story of an obscure lodging-house in a back street, and where I found a leather-colored old gentleman, in a voluminous white turban, and an ample, flowing, black robe, bound around his waist with a white scarf, and bordered around the sweeping skirts with the signs of the zodiac in white. This was the Egyptian astrologer.

"Well, this old man, this *soi-disant* astrologer, I found with appropriate surroundings—skulls, cross-bones, and skeletons; serpents, toads, and lizards; stills, crucibles, and cauldrons occupied the floor. Maps of unknown countries, probably Hades, and charts of unknown figures—probably diabolical—adorned the walls. At the upper end of the room was a large circle of wood painted black and set up perpendicularly against the wall, like a huge, round blackboard, and covered with mystic figures drawn in white. Opposite this, at the other extremity of the room, was a large mystic mirror.

"The only personal attendant of the old astrologer was the French interpreter.

"I made known my business, whereupon he put me through many preliminary degrees, too tedious to mention, and then began to unroll my whole life.

"He told me first of the past, of the loss of my mother, my father, and then of my home.

"I thought that he was deceiving me, that he saw 'alone' written legibly upon my brow, and only read it aloud. So I told him that I had not come thither to inquire of the past, which was well known to me, but to hear of the future, of which I was ignorant.

"Whereupon he required a night to cast my horoscope. He demanded, and I gave him, the day and hour of my birth, and then I took leave, with the promise to return in the morning. The next day I went——"

"Well?" questioned Constance, earnestly.

"My horoscope was a horrorscope indeed! It predicted for a me a short and a stormy life, and a sharp and sudden death!"

"Good Heaven! But—the details?"

"It prophesied four remarkable events, the first of which has already come to pass."

"And that was?"

"The loss of my patrimonial estate!"

"Singular coincidence!" interrupted Mr. Osborne, as he arose and joined his wife and brother-in-law at the other end of the room.

"I thought so when the prophecy was fulfilled," replied Gerald.

"And the other three events?" softly inquired Constance.

"The other three events, if they follow as predicted, must happen within the next two years, or before I reach my twenty-sixth anniversary. The first of these is to be the unexpected inheritance of vast wealth."

Upon hearing this, a bright smile played around the

lips of Constance, and banished the clouds from her brow. She waited a few minutes for him to proceed, but finding that he continued silent, she said:

"Well, Mr. Mostyn, go on! What was the third predicted event?"

"Do you command me to inform you?"

"No, sir; I beg you, of your courtesy, to do so."

"Very well," he said, dropping his voice to a low undertone. "It was to be my marriage with the woman I should love."

A deep, vivid flush supplanted the bright smile that quivered over Constance's variable face. There was a pause, broken at length by her voice, as she gently inquired:

"And the fourth?"

The answer came reluctantly, and in tones so low as to meet only her ear:

"The fourth and last prediction was that, before my twenty-sixth birthday, I should die a violent death."

A low cry broke from the lips of Constance, as her hands flew up and covered her face. After a minute or two she dropped them, and, looking him steadily in the face, said, with quiet firmness:

"You doubtless wonder at my emotion. Now, hear me. On the autumn following the summer in which that prediction was made to you, I was in York, with my grandmother, and with Mrs. Osborne, who was then Miss Heath. Curiosity took us to the rooms of the Egyptian, who was then practicing in that city. And after some preparations as he had used in your case, he cast my horoscope, and read my future. It was this—that before my twentieth birthday, I should be a bride, but never a wife, for that the fatal form of the scaffold arose between the nuptial benediction and the husband's hearth. Such were the words of the prophecy—a simi-

lar prediction was made by an old gypsy at the Derby only this spring."

She spoke with a solemnity that seemed to overshadow every other feeling.

Then shaking off the shadow from her brow, and speaking with bright cheerfulness, she called out:

"Mr. Osborne, how goes the night? Will there be a probability of my returning home this evening?"

The minister, who, with his wife and brother-in-law, formed a little self-constituted committee upon Sunday-schools, now spoke up in reply:

"Miss Wynne, harken to that rain! No living creature shall leave my roof to-night for any bourne whatever, except it be stout Peter, whom I shall send to the manor-house, to apprise your friends of your whereabouts."

"Very well, Mr. Osborne. You are aware that I never carry on a contest at the end of which I am sure of defeat! I yield myself your captive!" said Constance, gayly.

Gerald Mostyn arose and walked to the window, thence to the door, and finally up to Mr. Osborne, whom he addressed:

"I fear, sir, notwithstanding the state of the weather, that I shall be under the necessity of bidding you good-evening."

"Mr. Mostyn! I presume you heard the observation I addressed to Miss Wynne, and which is equally applicable to yourself, and also to my brother Frank here. Likewise, I suppose you are sufficiently well acquainted with these mountains to know that it will be impossible for you to ascend to-night, or even to-morrow. Finally, I suppose that no urgent business calls you to Bleakton. Moreover, listen to that rain!" said the minister, triumphantly.

The rain was indeed increasing, and beating with great violence against the house. There was no gainsaying it. Still, however, Gerald hesitated until his host leaned forward and whispered him, with an arch look:

"Do as you like, else I'll make you!"

With a sigh that was certainly not one of regret, Mr. Mostyn yielded the point, thanked his friend, and consented to remain, as he secretly wished to do, the guest of the house that sheltered Constance Wynne.

Sleep for Gerald Mostyn that night was impossible; for though he closed his eyes, he still saw Constance Wynne, with her ample, white forehead, her dark hair swept back from the wide temples, and her clear, luminous, most expressive eyes, now soaring to the heavens in an upward flight, now dropped upon his face in an earnest, quiet, penetrating study, now looking for some wondrous truth or beauty in the distant horizon of human knowledge. Long after all the rest of the household were asleep, he lay awake, haunted by the image of Constance Wynne.

It was late in the morning when he awoke, and on entering the parlor, he found Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and Mr. Heath awaiting him.

He greeted the circle, and looked anxiously around for another desired presence.

But Constance Wynne was nowhere visible.

Perhaps she was late with her toilet, yet that was so simple, too. It was discourteous not to wait for her. Such were his thoughts while he watched the door.

But she came not; and Mrs. Osborne smilingly announced that breakfast was served, and led the way to the dining-room.

"Surely they will not sit down without their fair guest?" he said.

But they gathered around the table. When they had said grace, and were seating themselves, he summoned resolution to say:

"I hope Miss Wynne is well this morning?"

"Very well, as always. She has flitted!"

"Flitted?"

"Gone, departed, vanished!"

CHAPTER V.

Hers the best fashioned and best ordered home
That ever eye beheld; and there, withal,
Is fit observance by the servants shown,
And gentle zeal in tending every guest.—G. CHAPMAN.

Mrs. Horton, the mistress of Llyndell, had been twice married, and twice widowed.

Constance Wynne was the descendant of her first marriage.

The three beauties—the Misses Horton—were the descendants of her second union.

The sole male inmate, and protector of the family, was Colonel North, the younger brother of Mrs. Horton.

For Constance, as the heiress of the family estate, she felt the utmost solicitude, and was never willing to trust her far or long from her sight.

And consequently, on receiving Mr. Osborne's message that Miss Wynne was detained at his house by the storm, she had summoned her coachman, and given him orders to have the carriage in readiness by sunrise the next morning, to drive over to the parsonage and bring his young mistress home.

The man had scrupulously followed her directions.

Constance had obeyed the call, and reached Llyndell in time for the family breakfast.

After kissing the fingers of the old lady, shaking hands with Colonel North, embracing her cousins, and answering everybody's questions, Constance seated herself at the table, and said:

"My dear grandmother, there is the son of an old friend of yours in the neighborhood."

"Ah, Constance, who is he?"

"Mr. Gerald Ross Mostyn, madam. He has come down to spend the two months' vacation at Crucis."

"Ay, my dear. Where is he staying?"

"At the tavern at Bleakton."

"Indeed! I wonder at that; it is scarcely a pleasant place for a gentleman's long sojourn. Why is he not the guest of his grandfather, Mr. Horne, or of his uncle, the doctor?"

"It would be scarcely pleasant, madam, for a man to be indebted even for hospitality to relatives who have robbed him of his patrimony."

"Robbed him? Surely, my dear, you use strong language!" said the old lady, rebukingly.

"Truly! It was a judicial robbery—not an indictable one," said Constance, in calm scorn.

"Ay, I have heard that, morally speaking, there was not just dealing; and law and justice are not always one, my dear."

"But to return to Mr. Mostyn himself. As you observed, madam, the inn is no pleasant abode for a gentleman——"

"Ay, I understand you, Constance, perfectly. And I think you are altogether right, my dear," replied the aged gentlewoman, who, then turning to her brother, said, with the measured formality she sometimes used even among her own near relatives:

"Colonel North, you are thinking of going to Bleakton to-day? Will you do me the favor to call on Mr. Mostyn, and invite him to make our house his home for the period of his sojourn in the neighborhood?"

"Certainly, my dear sister, with great pleasure," replied the colonel, looking up from his plate, and bowing his head.

And he was as good as his promise; nor did he find Gerald Mostyn hard to persuade to accept the invita-

tion when it was put to him that the colonel had given his word to "the ladies" that he was to bring Mr. Mostyn with him.

Gerald accepted the inevitable, declaring that "ladies' commands had as much authority as bench warrants."

And in one hour more the colonel, with his invited guest, set out for Llyndell.

Gerald Mostyn was not the only arrival there, for hardly had Mrs. Horton given Evans, her housekeeper, instructions to get one of the spare rooms in readiness when Lord Starr and his son, Captain Starr, drove up to the door and were received with all the deference that belonged to two such "eligible" men, occupying high social positions and possessed of immense fortune, one a widower of fifty, the other a bachelor of twenty-five.

Gerald was introduced formally to the Misses Horton —May, Lily and Violet; but was keenly disappointed to find that Constance was not present.

Happily he had scarcely time to speculate upon the cause of her absence, when the door opened softly, and Constance entered. She advanced with graceful dignity—her head gently thrown back, her eyelids cast down, her dark hair swept off in shining waves from her fair, white forehead, and her snow-white dress falling in classic folds around her perfect form. She greeted the visitors with stately grace.

Gerald's heart bounded to see her. He could not help it—it was magnetism—he sprang to meet her, led her to a seat, and took his place beside her. The very openness of this act blended suspicion to the deep love that was consuming his heart.

But the company was too small to permit any two to indulge in *tête-à-tête*. The conversation, per force, became general—with one transient exception—Mrs. Horton, catching her brother's eye, signed for him to ap-

proach her; and when the colonel found himself by his sister's side, she said:

"I want a few friends here this evening to meet Lord Starr. Now, is there anything so serious between our guest, Mr. Ross Mostyn, and his relatives, the Hornes, as to make it improper for me to invite them during his stay?"

"By no means! for though he does not choose to take up his residence among them, yet, by what I understand from himself, they are on polite, if not affectionate terms."

"Very good! I will slip out and write my notes, as there is no time to be lost," said Mrs. Horton, as she quietly withdrew from the room.

CHAPTER VI.

I do refer to the oracle—
Break up the seals and read.—SHAKESPEARE.

After tea was over, the company adjourned to the drawing-room, where, soon after, the guests invited for the evening joined them.

The first arrivals were Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and Mr. Heath.

Immediately after them came Dr. and Mrs. James Horne—the doctor a man of great fashion and elegance, the lady a delicate, pensive woman, with a sort of sad, moonlight face, beaming softly out between her fleecy locks of jet.

And, last of all, to the astonishment of everybody, came old Mr. Horne, who had been invited as a matter of courtesy, and was not in the least degree expected to make his appearance. The old gentleman was of medium height, and spare habit, slightly bent, yet not without some remaining elegance of form. He had high, thin, aquiline features, and a bald, receding forehead, fringed around the temples and the back of the head with venerable silver locks. He was dressed with scrupulous care in a suit of clerical black, relieved by delicate shirt frills, and adorned by a richly-wrought chain. In a word, there was no external sign of the genus miser about the man.

He came not alone. On his arm he brought a young girl, uninvited, but whom, with grave courtesy, he presented to his hostess as Miss Owen, the daughter of a deceased friend, and now his ward, who had arrived only that morning, and whom, presuming on Mrs. Horton's well-known kindness, he had ventured to present to her.

Enough! Thus commended to her consideration, the old gentlewoman received the young maiden, bidding her warmly welcome to Llyndell.

Alice Owen was a beauty—not certainly of the noble order of Constance Wynne, nor yet of the waxen style of the Misses Horton—but with the glowing, Oriental type, of the Asiatic girl. Her figure was *petite,* exquisitely proportioned, and gracefully rounded. Her features were regular and softly moulded; her complexion was of the clearest olive, deepening in the cheeks and lips into the most glowing bloom; her eyes were of the darkest hazel, long-lashed, languid, and full of suppressed fire; a wealth of sunbright chestnut curls clustered around her beautiful face.

Mrs. Horton, a reader of faces, was certainly attracted toward her; and, after a little talk, that confirmed her first favorable impressions, she took the hand of the orphan girl, and conducted her to the group formed by the Misses Horton, Captain Starr, Mr. Heath, Mr. Mostyn and Miss Wynne.

Modest, yet genial, the young stranger glided gracefully into the spirit of the youthful circle to which she was introduced.

Under the auspices of Miss May Horton, they were just about to form what she called a Sybil's Circle, for which purpose Messrs. Heath and Starr were dispatched to bring forward a round table. Miss May went to a cabinet to seek the "Sybil's Leaves," which she presently produced. All the youthful party then seated themselves around the table—that is, all except Constance, who held back, and Gerald, who seemed to abide her decision.

"Come, Miss Wynne, we await you," spoke Captain Starr.

"Come, Constance, come!" exclaimed May, the destined "Sybil" of the evening.

"I dare not. Even in sport I dare not tempt again the revelation of the future," said Constance, in a low whisper to her companion.

Startled at seeing again this one weakness of her otherwise perfect character, Mr. Mostyn smiled. Ah! what power his smile or frown already possessed for her!

"I will go," she said, suddenly; and, turning a shade paler, she took her seat at the mystic table. Mr. Mostyn placed himself beside her.

A dead silence reigned. May shuffled the cards, turned them with their faces down, and then, addressing her right-hand neighbor, Captain Starr, in a low voice, she demanded:

"What would you with the sybil?"

"I would know the future partner of my life," was the formal answer.

"Draw!"

The young man hesitated for a while, smiled, and, rejecting all those cards that were nearest himself, put his hand under the pack, and withdrew the lowest one.

"Read," he said, extending the card to the sybil.

"Hear," she exclaimed—

"A widow, beautiful as light,
'Twill be your lot to wed—
With a rich jointure, which shall pour
Its blessings on your head."

There was a general clapping of hands, and shouts of laughter, and exclamations of—

"A widow!"

"Oh, Captain Starr, who would have thought it!"

"And where will he pick up such a paragon of a wealthy widow?"

"I'll tell you! Dr. Horne will take one of his own prescriptions by mistake one of these days, and then——"

"Oh, yes! I've noticed how the captain seems to admire the lady——"

"Surely, ladies, there is no harm in respectful admiration," suggested the young man.

"Oh, certainly not! Certainly not! Especially of brilliant young widows!"

"I hate young widows!" broke forth the captain.

General and ringing laughter followed this promulgation of sentiment.

The hilarity attracted the attention of the elder members of the party, who, growing tired of politics and theology, drew near the group around the table.

"What are we about, young ladies?" questioned Lord Starr, who took his stand behind the sybil's chair.

"Telling fortunes if it please your lordship," answered Miss Violet. "Stand by and you will see some fun!"

"You are to be father-in-law to a widow!" said Miss Lily.

"Won't you try your fortune, sir?" asked Miss May.

"With great pleasure," returned Lord Starr.

"What would you with the sybil?"

"I would know the future partner of my life."

"Draw!"

Lord Starr laughingly drew a card, and handed it up to be read.

"Hear!" exclaimed the sybil, reading:

"A miss in her teens."

The laughter arose more wildly than before.

"Oh, dear! A miss in her teens for his wife, and a widow for his daughter-in-law!" exclaimed half-a-dozen

voices simultaneously; and under cover of the renewed laughter, the minister subsided into privacy.

"It was now Miss Violet's turn to test her fate. Being a young lady, she would not put the question in the usual form, but merely inquired what should be her future fate. The answer drawn was:

"To dandle fools and chronicle small beer,"

a reply that nearly extinguished Miss Violet for the evening.

"I declare there is old Mr. Horne," exclaimed the lively Violet, as the old miser sauntered deliberately to the table, and stood looking with indolent curiosity upon the game of the young people. "Come, Mr. Horne, I declare you shall have your fortune told."

"The fortune of four-score years is well-nigh told, young lady."

"Nay, no one's fate is complete while he lives. Draw!"

"Well, well, the commands of ladies are not to be disobeyed," replied the old man, gallantly, as he extended his hand and drew a card, which he passed to the sybil.

Amid a profound silence, and in solemn voice, she read:

"Thy fate looms full of horror. From false friends,
Near at hand, perdition threatens thee!—
A fearful sign stands in thy house of life!—
An enemy—a fiend lurks close behind
The radiance of thy planet. Oh, be warned!"

"Pshaw! what serious mockery!" exclaimed the old man, scornfully, as he turned away, and gave place to his nephew, who had all the while been posted behind him, peeping over his shoulder.

"Will you permit me to test my fortune?" inquired the "fascinating" Dr. Horne.

"And what would you with the sybil?" was the response.

"I would know the future."

"Draw!" said the sybil, in a tone of assumed sternness.

Smiling his graceful but most sinister smile, the doctor drew a card, and passed it to the reader.

"Hear!" said the latter, lifting the tablet of fate, and reading:

"I know thee!—thou fearest the solemn night!
With her piercing stars, and her deep winds' might—
There's a tone in her voice thou fain wouldst shun
For it asks what the secret soul hath done!
And thou—there's a weight on thine—away—
Back to thy home and pray!"

"Oh! see, see, how pale the doctor has grown," exclaimed the flippant Violet. "One would really think to look at him that 'a deep remorse for some unacted crime' preyed on him."

"Nonsense! Jugglery!" said the latter, turning away to conceal his disturbance.

The eyes of Constance Wynne followed him with the deepest interest. There was that upon his brow that she had never seen before.

The next in course was Alice. Turning to her, May said:

"What seek you in that magic circle, lady?"

"My destiny," answered the luscious tones.

"Invoke the knowledge!"

Alice drew a tablet, and passed it, as usual, to the sybil, who read:

"Oh, ask me not to speak thy fate!
Oh, tempt me not to tell,
The doom shall make thee desolate,
The wrong thou mayest not quell!
Away! Away!—for death would be
Even as mercy unto thee!"

Alice suddered, and covered her face with her hands.

"I will put up the tablets! They are growing fatal!" said May.

"No! no, indeed, I thank you! It is not fair. There's Constance, and Mr. Heath, and Mr. Mostyn, whose fortune has not been tried yet!" said Lily and Violet.

"Some one else must officiate, then, for I cannot," said May, rising in great disturbance.

"No! no! The sybil of the beginning must be the sybil of the end. Besides—now that she is shaken as by a storm—now that the power of the god is upon her, she becomes truly inspired and prophetic—her words are destinies!" exclaimed Mr. Heath, in mock gravity.

"Assuredly," assented the others. And May was forced to resume her seat.

"Your turn is next. Draw, sir!" she said, pushing the tablets toward the last-named gentleman.

Mr. Heath drew a leaf, and passed it to the sybil, who read:

"I see the cloud and the tempest near,
The voice of the troubled tide I hear—
Thy boom's bark on the surge I see,
And, wanderer, thy loved one is there with thee!"

"Dark, indeed; as the sayings of the sybil usually are," said Mr. Heath, smiling ruefully.

"Foreboding, still foreboding! Oh, let me resign this office!" prayed May.

"Not for the world, now that each word is fate! There is a couple yet to be disposed of. Miss Wynne, draw near," said Mr. Heath.

The cheek of Constance Wynne changed; yet striving with a feeling that she felt to be unworthy, she smiled, reached forth her hand, drew a tablet, and passed it to the sybil, who, in an effective voice, read:

"A dream is on my soul!
I see a bride—all crowned with flowers, and smiling,
As in delighted visions, on the brink
Of a dread chasm!"

Constance heard in silence, remembering the strange correspondence of these lines with the prediction of the wandering gypsy, endeavoring to convince herself that it was mere coincidence, and vainly trying to subdue the foreboding of her heart.

"Mr. Mostyn," said May, shuffling the tablets, and passing them to him.

He drew a card, and returned it to be perused.

The sybil took it, and a thrill of superstitious terror shook her frame as she read:

——"Disgrace and ill
And shameful death are near!"

An irrepressible low cry broke from the pallid lips of Constance.

"Throw up the cards!" she said; "it is wicked—this tampering with the mysteries of the future!"

May quickly swept them from the table, and the circle broke up in a strange dismay.

"She has one weakness!" said Gerald, reflecting upon this peculiar idiosyncracy of Constance Wynne. "She has one weakness! I am glad of it! It makes her more human—draws her still nearer to me! for, but for that one weakness, she would be perfect!"

Refreshments, now brought in and served around, created some diversion among the young people, and gave some agreeable occupation to the old. But Constance Wynne could not, during the remainder of the evening, recover her serenity.

The company soon afterward broke up. The guests

that had been invited for the evening took leave, and departed to ride home by the pleasant moonlight.

In bidding his grandson good-night, Mr. Horne had said:

"I shall expect to see you at the house before your departure for the city, Gerald."

"I thank you, sir," returned the latter, with a grave bow; for he understood this surly invitation only as a matter of form, and did not dream of an acceptance.

CHAPTER VII.

And he loved her—certes,
As he loves all heavenly objects, with uplifted eyes and hands;
As he loved pure inspiration—loved the graces—loved the muses;
In a love content with writing its own name on desert sands.
—E. B. BROWNING.

Mrs. Horton had her own private opinions concerning the attraction that drew the great minister from the cares of state and the circle of a court down to this remote country neighborhood. And ere a week had passed she found her conjectures to be correct.

Lord Starr had met Constance Wynne for the first time at the Derby. He had been pleased with her from the first, and his approbation increased with time and reflection.

In a word, he had come down to Wales with the fixed determination of making her his wife, and he had seized all the opportunities afforded by his visit to advance his suit with the heiress.

But Constance rejected these overtures with such emphasis that his lordship's brow grew dark and a glance of hatred shot beneath his black brows at Gerald Mostyn and herself.

Yes, in declining Lord Starr's proposal Constance had made a mortal enemy.

Lord Starr left early next day, and, much relieved by the departure of his powerful rival, Gerald Mostyn continued the favored and happy guest of Llyndell. Early every morning he rode out with Miss Wynne and her cousins; but before the ride was over he was almost sure to find himself *tête-à-tête* with Constance, being either in advance or in the rear of the riding party. Dur-

ing the later hours of the forenoon he entertained the young ladies by reading aloud to them while they worked at their embroidery frames; but before the reading was over he was almost certain to find himself in warm and confidential discussion with Constance alone, one after another of the girls having withdrawn upon some slight pretext.

Why did the Misses Horton act in this manner?

First, because, with the quick perception of womanhood, they had seen the growing attachment between Gerald and Constance; secondly, because, with the unreasoning sensibility of girlhood, they really sympathized with the lovers; thirdly, because, being themselves somewhat worldly, they could feel no possible jealousy of their cousin's handsome, though penniless admirer.

Meanwhile, the day of Gerald's departure for London drew near.

It was the evening previous to the morning of his intended departure.

Mrs. Horton and Colonel North had retired.

The young people were promenading upon the long, vine-shaded porch in front of the house. But one by one they dropped off into the drawing-room, until at length, as usual, Gerald Mostyn found himself alone with Constance Wynne. Their conversation upon different matters had died out—each being indisposed to speak upon the subjects that concerned neither. The near departure of Gerald occupied the thoughts and oppressed the hearts of both.

Feeling the temptation to clasp her to his bosom, and pour the history of his great love into her ear, growing every instant stronger, becoming almost irresistible, and wishing, above all things, to preserve his integrity, he resolved to put an immediate period to the interview. Pausing, therefore, in his promenade, he said:

"Miss Wynne, forgive my thoughtlessness; I have detained you too long exposed to the damp evening air."

"Oh, no, no," began Constance; but her deep tones vibrated as the chords of an æolian harp when swept by the wind, and died away in silence.

"Permit me to lead you in and to bid you—farewell!"

"Farewell!" she echoed, in a thrilling voice. "Oh! surely not yet, farewell? We shall see you to-morrow morning?"

"Ah, no! Colonel North has kindly placed a horse and groom at my service, and I depart at daybreak to meet the train at Bleakton," he answered, mournfully, as he led her toward the hall door. Arrived thither, he paused, took her hand respectfully, and held it while he said:

"Constance, permit me to thank you for all the kindness you have shown toward 'a poor, wayfaring' young man—to acknowledge most gratefully all the faith, hope and strength with which you have inspired him—to bless you, Constance, and to say—farewell forever!" He lifted her throbbing hand to his lips, pressed upon it a burning kiss, resigned it, and turned away.

"Gerald!"

It was only his name, breathed in a low voice by Constance Wynne; but all the deep, passionate emotion of her soul vibrated along its syllables.

"Constance! Constance!" he responded. He was at her side, at her feet in an instant. And then and there the sealed fountain of love was set free. He told her all! —his youthful dream of the ideal woman who should be the companion of his life; his meeting with her in the church; his recognizing her as his ideal; his mistaking her, through the simplicity of her dress and manner, for some poor though noble girl, whom he resolved to seek out and woo; his despair on discovering her to be an

heiress; his vain struggle with his growing love; his final resolution to depart without declaring his feelings; and, last of all, that little touch of true nature which had melted the seal of silence from his heart.

She heard him out, and then broke forth in eloquent reply. She asked him how it was possible that he, understanding her nature as he claimed to do, should suppose her capable of misconstruing his motives; or how it happened that he, indifferent to accidents of fortune as he professed to be, should yet affix so much importance to her possession of wealth as to make that circumstance an obstacle to a good understanding between them?

He smiled and said:

"Your straightforward, trenchant nature, noble girl, would cut the gordian knot, rather than untie it. Well, dearest Constance! all that I have to offer you is an upright heart that has never swerved from rectitude; a fresh heart that has never before bowed before the shrine of womanhood; a constant heart through good or ill, for time and eternity, that is wholly yours. Years may pass, dearest girl, before I shall be in a position to claim this coveted hand, and to ask you to contract yourself in so long and uncertain an engagement would be ungenerous; therefore, dearest Constance, while I bind myself irrevocably to you as my liege lady, I would fain leave you unfettered by any promise."

"As if I would consent to so one-sided and unjust an engagement! No, Gerald! my nature demands that every engagement to which I may be a party must be justly proportioned, clearly defined, well understood. I am not yet my own mistress. I am a minor, and belong, in some sense, to my grandmother and uncle. I could not, under any circumstances, marry without their consent. Go to them, therefore, to-morrow, dear Gerald,

and make known our engagement and solicit their sanction!"

"You permit me to do this, dear, candid girl?"

"Duty commands us to take this straightforward course, dear Gerald! But now it is time we should separate for the evening. Good-night! I will not say good-by!"

"Good-night! good-night! may all good angels guard and bless you, noble girl! dearest Constance!" he exclaimed, pressing her hand to his lips in passionate ardor, and then respectfully handed her through the hall door.

And Constance sought her pillow, not to sleep—but to lie dreaming "love's young dream."

And for hours longer Gerald paced up and down the vine-shaded porch in a dizzy trance of joy, then sought his couch to dream of—Constance.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ah me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.

* * * * *

If, then, true lovers have been ever crossed,
It stands as an edict in destiny;
Then let us teach our trial patience.—SHAKESPEARE.

Next morning, Gerald sought Colonel North in his study, and in a simple, manly and dignified manner declared his love for Constance Wynne and his desire to make her his wife.

The colonel was very angry.

"Sir, I am astonished!" he cried. "I am overwhelmed with consternation, sir! Constance Wynne, sir? Do you happen to know who she is, sir? Are you aware of her social position, sir? of her high pretensions, sir? of her brilliant prospects, sir?"

"Colonel North, I believe that I am fully aware of all the circumstances which you have taken the pains to bring to my recollection. Furthermore, I know Miss Wynne; and knowing, love her; and loving, desire to make her my wife," said the young man, with stately courtesy.

"Then, sir, I can only repeat that I am amazed, sir!—yes, sir, astounded, sir!—yes, sir, thunderstruck, sir, at your effrontery!"

"Permit me to recall to you, Colonel North, the fact that Miss Wynne herself has authorized the proposals that I have the honor to submit to you."

"Marry Constance Wynne, sir? No, sir! assuredly not, sir! most assuredly not, sir! I tell you that—that I stand appalled at the question!"

"Very well! having at length received a distinct answer, I have only to wish you good-morning, colonel," said the young man, bowing, somewhat ironically.

Colonel North now in some degree recovered himself, and recollected what became him as a host, and what was due to Mr. Mostyn as his guest. Rising, he said, rather inconsistently, and perhaps somewhat sarcastically:

"Yes, sir! Miss Wynne's family, of course, feel highly honored by the very flattering proposal you have made them; and they regret very much that for many cogent reasons they should be forced to decline the distinction you designed them. Good-morning, sir," the colonel concluded, rather abruptly, seeing, in fact, that Mr. Mostyn, deeply disgusted, was not disposed to endure the continuation of his speech.

Gerald bowed once more, and withdrew. Assured of Constance's love, he cared very little for her guardian's unreasonable opposition. A few years, he knew, if they did not bring Colonel North to a more rational and humane view of the case, would, at least, enfranchise Constance from his authority.

With these hopeful feelings he went downstairs and sought her presence.

"Well, what matters it?" she said. "It was our duty to have no concealments from my guardian, but to make known to him at once our purposes. I even expected his opposition; it is of no real importance; for though while I am rightfully under his authority, I will, of course, obey him; yet, when I am my own mistress, I shall follow the rational dictates of my own mind. In two years from next Christmas I shall have reached my legal majority, shall be mistress of myself and of my fortune. At the end of that time, dear Gerald, you will claim me as your wife; and until that time regard me as your betrothed!" she said, and frankly held out her hand.

He caught and pressed it to his heart. Then he took from around his neck a little black ribbon, with a slender gold ring attached to it.

"This, dear Constance, was my mother's wedding ring. She, in dying, placed it on my finger, and bade me wear it until I should transfer it to my betrothed. I wore it on my hand until my finger outgrew it; then I attached it to this ribbon, and wore it round my neck. Will you let me now obey my mother's behest, and place it upon the finger of my betrothed?"

"Yes; and the pledge shall be as sacred as if placed there in the church by the minister of God," said Constance, solemnly, holding out her left hand.

He slipped the ring upon the third finger, lifted the lovely hand to his lips for an instant, and resigned it.

"Constance, I may write to you?" he inquired.

"Assuredly, unless our correspondence should be forbidden by my guardian, in which case we must submit and be patient, I suppose. The years will wear around at last."

In half an hour from that time Gerald Mostyn bade adieu to the family; and, declining the proffer of a horse and groom, set out to walk up to Bleakton, which he reached by noon, and whence he sent a messenger to Llyndell to fetch his luggage.

And by the next morning's train Mr. Mostyn journeyed toward London, which he reached in due time.

It had been agreed between Mrs. Horton and Colonel North that it would be the best policy to refrain from mentioning to Constance the subject of her discarded lover, that he might perchance be the more easily forgotten. Thus Constance was left in peace.

And when the next mail brought her a letter from Gerald, with several other epistles, for Constance had quite an extensive correspondence among her late

schoolmates, it escaped notice. And when she answered it, and gave the answer, with other similar-looking missives, into the hands of the messenger, the act escaped comment. In short, though Constance disdained to make a secret of the fact, yet, either because her guardians did not really know of its existence, or that they did not think it politic to draw the chains of authority too tightly around her, or else because they had absolute confidence in her integrity, or for whatever reason, it is certain that the correspondence was not interfered with.

* * * * * * * *

We will not weary our readers by narrating in detail the struggles of Gerald Mostyn up the thorny steep of fame. It is enough for our purpose to say that in two years from the time of his first admission to practice in the courts he was generally known as a very highly talented and rising young lawyer.

At the close of the court term he turned his attention to politics, the twin-sister of law. He embraced the interests of the Liberal party, and his person, fame and eloquence became known to the people, his name was caught up and advanced as a candidate for the House of Commons; and, borne on the swelling tide of popular favor, he was elected to represent the borough of Wilton in Parliament.

About this time he renewed, by letter, his proposals for the hand of Miss Wynne; but, notwithstanding his brilliant success, he was again, upon the ground of his want of fortune, rejected by her guardian.

But now an event was approaching destined to change the whole current of his future life.

CHAPTER IX.

On every lip a speechless horror dwelt;
On every brow the burthen of affliction;
The old ancestral spirits knew and felt
The house's malediction!—THOMAS HOOD.

Success is the worldly measure of worth. The brilliant success of Gerald Mostyn had produced its natural effect upon his churlish relative, old Hugh Horne, dwelling in his remote and lonely home at Horne's Hole. Now, whether, as was likely, the old man's mind was failing, or from whatever cause it might have been, he certainly did not act with his habitual caution in expressing his sentiments; but to his frequent visitor, Dr. Horne, he would often say:

"Ah, ha! that puppy Mostyn is turning out better than one could have expected, eh?"

"Hem-m! let us hope that it is so, sir; but adventurers are unreliable persons," would be the cool reply of the doctor.

Whereupon old Hugh Horne would secretly turn upon his nephew a keen glance from under the cover of his bushy brows, reading his very soul.

At another time he said:

"Bravo, James! I congratulate you. Your Cousin Gerald is getting on. His gaining of the Goldsborough suit is said to be one of the greatest triumphs of the season."

"Hem-m, yes, sir; though, for my own part, I should think that reckless young man quite as likely to die by the law as to live by it," dryly returned Dr. Horne.

"Take care, lad! 'Evil prophecies, like chickens, often come home to roost!'"

Again, a few months after, he exclaimed:

"Ha, James, wish me joy! My grandson, Mr. Mostyn, has been elected to a seat in the House of Commons. He will be a distinguished man yet!"

"This old wretch is certainly geting into his dotage. He must be humored and taken care of, or to the demon with my prospects of being his heir. If this goes on a month longer, he will destroy the will he has made in my behalf, and make another in favor of his precious grandson, or else die intestate, in which case this 'all-praised' Gerald is heir-at-law," thought Dr. Horne; but he replied:

"I do, from the bottom of my heart, congratulate you, sir, upon an event that none of us had any reason to anticipate; and I hope that it may end happily. I must in all candor confess, however, that his sudden abandonment of his legitimate profession for a political career does not speak well for his stability of purpose."

With another keen, covert side-glance from under the bushy brows, the old man perused the speaker's thoughts as the lines of a printed page.

From the evening upon which this conversation occurred, Hugh Horne's health of mind and body declined.

Dr. Horne redoubled his attentions to the invalid, and at the same time reported everywhere that his days were numbered, that no art of medicine could prolong his life, or do more than modify his sufferings.

Affairs went on in this manner for some weeks longer, when old Hugh Horne, with the caprice of illness, suddenly dismissed his nephew from professional attendance upon him, and declared that none should prescribe for him except young Mr. Heath, who had lately received his diploma as a practitioner. The ostensible reason given by the old man for this strange step was that a change of

physicians and of treatment was often good for the ailing; and to soothe the smarting of this wound to Dr. Horne's self-love, he said that he should always be very happy to see his nephew, "as a friend, unprofessionally."

But Dr. Horne, in his bitter mortification, let fall some words of complaint that provoked from the sick man the astounding retort of:

"Sir, I would be attended by a medical man who is not too deeply interested in my death."

Silenced by this reply, which the doctor professed to ascribe to the infatuations of dotage, he repressed all evidences of his deep feeling of humiliation, and, taking the old man at his former word, actually continued to visit him as a friend. Every one who heard of this change of doctors, ascribed the conduct of old Hugh Horne to the caprice of dotage, and characterized the act as one of extreme injustice, for Dr. Horne's acknowledged skill as a physician was only equaled by his great personal popularity.

But strangely enough, and doubtless from another caprice—to wit, of nature—from the day of Dr. Horne's dismissal, the old man, under the care of young Dr. Heath, and the tender nursing of gentle Alice Owen, rapidly convalesced.

And not only restoration of health to mind and body, but regeneration of spirit, seemed possible for this octogenarian forgetter of God. His better thoughts were, under divine Providence, mainly due to the sweet influence of his orphan ward. Daily and nightly the prayers of gentle Alice ascended for the poor old man—for whom no other living creature prayed—that time might be granted him to prepare for the great change; that the root of bitterness might be drawn from his heart; that he might be led to "repentance not to be repented of;" that his soul might be saved alive. Daily she read to

him from the Holy Scriptures, and daily she presented, in her own lovely life, the beauty of Christianity—an example more powerful than the most eloquent precepts for the purposes of conversion. In her pious efforts, this meek follower of the Saviour was aided both by Mr. Heath and by Mr. Osborne, who, at the old man's express desire, came often to see him. Old as Mr. Horne was, it was pitiable to witness his anxiety to get well, and to live longer.

"I am eighty-two years old, but I am so much better that—who knows?—I may live to be ninety-two, or even a hundred. If I could live twenty years longer, how hard I should work to unravel the web of evil I have woven; but it is in vain to hope it, and if I were to give my body to be burned, I could not give satisfaction!" he said, despairingly, to Alice, for only to that gentle girl did he speak with perfect freedom.

"Oh, sir," she replied, "you know that our Heavenly Father accepts the disposition for the deed. Sincere repentance is the only satisfaction we can any of us ever make, and it is received of our Lord, whose mercy is infinitely greater than all our needs."

Meanwhile winter approached, and the old man's physical health again fluctuated unfavorably, while his spiritual condition continued to improve.

At a distance, important events, interesting to other members of his family, were progressing. Parliament met, and the maiden speech of the Honorable Gerald Mostyn upon the income tax electrified the whole country with its tremendous power.

In his leathern armchair, in his sick-chamber at Horne's Hole, old Mr. Horne heard the report of this great triumph, and put on his spectacles to read the speech.

"That boy knew what he was about when he went to

Oxford. He was right and I was wrong! A hard admission for an old man of eighty-two to make, eh, Alice? Alice, my dear, I do greatly desire to be at peace with all men. Take a pen and ink, my child, and write to Mr. Mostyn, and desire him, from me, to come down, if he should have time, at Christmas, and spend the week with his old grandfather at Horne's Hole."

The young girl joyfully obeyed, and the letter was written, and was, that same forenoon, dispatched to Bleakton post office.

In due time the answer arrived. Mr. Mostyn could not say whether he could stay a week at Christmas; but, in any case, he would comply with his grandfather's request, and come down, if it were only for one day.

Satisfied with this promise, the old man became tranquil, and now another letter came announcing to him that Mr. Mostyn would arrive at the Hole on the night of Christmas eve; that he would spend Christmas day with Mr. Horne, but that he should be obliged to set out on his return to town on the morning of the twenty-sixth. This prospect of soon seeing his grandson filled the heart of the failing man with childish delight. And in the softness of his mood he pitied his old favorite, Dr. Horne, and, as usual, imparted his sentiments to Alice Owen, saying:

"My dear, I am afraid that I have been at heart unjust to poor James, and, if so, how very unjust. My dear, I distrust my own judgment. Better to err on the side of charity, is it not? At least I must have a candid interview with him, put things upon a right footing, and have my purpose clearly understood. Take your pen, my dear, and write a note, and ask James to come over here as soon as possible, for I am anxious to see him."

Alice immediately complied, and the note was dis-

patched by a messenger. After an absence of two hours, the man returned with the answer that Dr. Horne was absent, and would not be home again for several days, but that he had left the note with Mrs. Horne.

Dr. Horne, in fact, reached home on the evening of the twenty-third of December, and on the morning of the next day—Christmas eve—he hastened over to Horne's Hole to obey the call of the old man.

The uncle and nephew were closeted for several hours in a confidential interview, at the end of which Dr. Horne came out of the chamber with a gloomy and distracted brow, mounted his horse, and instantly rode home.

That same night, according to appointment, Gerald Mostyn arrived. The old man welcomed him with cordial friendship, had a long and confidential conversation with him, detaining him in his chamber until long after midnight, and, in fact, until Gerald, fearing to injure him by keeping him from sleep, insisted upon retiring to his own room.

The next day being Christmas, and fine, genial weather for the season, old Mr. Horne was dressed, and wheeled out in his chair to the parlor that adjoined his chamber, which was situated on the ground floor. He wished to meet his family—what were left of them—once more at a Christmas dinner-table.

There were present Dr. and Mrs. Horne, Mr. Mostyn, and Alice Owen. It was scarcely a merry Christmas feast; the old man, notwithstanding his age and decrepitude, was, perhaps, as cheerful as any of the others; Dr. Horne's hilarity was too hollow to be contagious, and his wife saw and sympathized with his mental disturbance; Gerald Mostyn's thoughts were absent with Constance Wynne; and Alice Owen, whose gentle and pliable nature was all too subject to receive its coloring

from the mood of those around her, sat silent and pensive.

As the mountain pass was very bad between Horne's Hole and Radnor's Ruin, and as the afternoons were short, it was necessary that, immediately after dinner, the doctor and his wife should set out for home.

After they had taken leave and departed, the old man, Gerald Mostyn and Alice Owen gathered around the fire, and, strange as it may appear, the three felt, in the absence of the others, a great weight lifted from their spirits. The hours were passed in cheerful conversation, until Alice went out to order supper; for it was necessary that the last meal should be early served, as the old man, greatly fatigued, was anxious to retire to bed, and Mr. Mostyn was under the necessity of leaving the same night for Bleakton, to catch the early train for London.

Alice was a thrifty little housekeeper, and under her auspices the supper was soon served.

When the meal was over and the table cleared off, the household servants were brought together, and, at the request of old Mr. Horne, Gerald Mostyn conducted the evening family worship.

"I wish you would see me in bed before you depart, Gerald," entreated the old man, who seemed to cling with childish weakness to the presence of his grandson.

"With pleasure, sir," replied Mr. Mostyn, rising to assist the old man.

"Good-night, my dear Alice! God bless and reward you for all your goodness!" he said, pressing the hand of his young nurse.

"Not good-night yet, sir. I shall look in before retiring, to see that you are quite comfortable."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear," said Mr. Horne, as, leaning on the strong arm of his grandson, he passed from the parlor into his chamber.

Gerald assisted him in undressing, helped him into bed, and arranged his pillows and covering comfortably about him. Then, at the old man's request, he sat down beside him, and conversed until the clock struck ten, when he arose to take leave, and, with a promise to return at the first opportunity and spend a week at the Hole, he shook hands with his grandfather, left the room, bade Alice good-by, mounted the horse that stood awaiting his use, and rode off for Bleakton.

After his departure, Alice arose from her seat by the parlor fire and passed into her guardian's room, according to promise, to see if he was comfortable. The old man was lying so quietly, with his eyes closed and his hands folded upon his breast, that she thought he was sleeping, and shaded the lamp with her hand, lest its glare should startle him. But he was already awake, and as she approached he opened his eyes and said:

"I am not asleep, Alice, my dear."

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" she inquired, gently.

"No, my child."

"How do you feel after your fatiguing day?"

"Better than for a long time past, dear; better in the spirit, as well as in the flesh. Alice, I feel satisfied—I feel as if the Lord had accepted my late repentance."

"Doubtless he has, dear sir. Are you wakeful? If so, shall I sit beside you and read or sing you to sleep?"

"Thank you, dear girl. I am not wakeful, but inclined to sleep; nevertheless, if you please, you may sit by me for a few minutes, and sing, in your own sweet voice, your favorite hymn:

"'I would not live alway.'"

Alice seated herself, and commenced in a low and tender key to sing those beautiful but too pensive stanzas. The singing occupied no more than five or six minutes,

and, by the time the hymn was finished, the old man was in a deep and placid sleep.

She stooped over to assure herself of this. His eyes were calmly closed; his lips gently compressed; his hands folded together as in prayer; his whole aspect serene as that of sleeping infancy.

"May the Lord bless the poor old man," murmured Alice, as, shading the light with her hand, she softly glided from the room and closed the door behind her.

The fires were all out, the servants were all retired to their distant rooms; the house was solitary, silent and gloomy. Alice secured the fastenings of the doors and windows, and then ascended to her own room, which was immediately over that of old Hugh Horne. She offered up her private devotions, and then blew out her candle and retired to bed.

But, for some strange reason, she could not sleep; never had the solitude, silence and gloom of the old house so oppressed her spirits. It was a starless, dark and cloudy winter night, and the sighing of the wind through the wild mountain gorges, and among the old beams and rafters of the gable roofs, sounded like the prophetic wailings of some household spirit. A vague presentiment of approaching evil, a deep impression of some atrocious agency drawing near, a dark overshadowing of some impending horror weighed heavily upon her soul; a wild impulse to start up, to cry out, to fly from the lonely house assailed her. In vain she reasoned, prayed and struggled to subdue this tremendous agitation of her spirits; for hours she turned and turned in wakeful terrors, or tossed about in frightful dreams. It must have been some time after midnight when she fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion from which she was terribly shocked—shocked by a single, prolonged, appalling cry, that rang through and through the lonely house, and out upon the silent night!

CHAPTER X.

Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.—SHAKESPEARE.

With that appalling cry still ringing in her ear, Alice sprang out of bed and stood upon the floor, shaking from head to foot.

Was it a dream—the fearful shriek, pealing out upon the night, and then suddenly stifled as by suffocation?

For an instant that seemed an age she remained with every nerve acute with attention.

Hark! Heaven of heavens! what sound was that?

A low, subdued, floundering struggle, a half-suffocated groan, and a fall!

It came from the room immediately under her own—from the chamber of old Hugh Horne.

Paralyzed with terror, she stood for a moment, and then, at the thought of danger, of death, violent death, to the helpless old man below, all personal fear was conquered! Quickly striking a light, she hurried from the room out into the bleak passageway, down the winding staircase, and through the cheerless lower hall into the parlor.

So far all was yet dark and still—the feeble rays of her own taper making the darkness more "visible," the faint echo of her own footsteps making the silence more apparent.

She paused an instant in the parlor, which remained so exactly as it had been left, looked so quiet, wore such an aspect of domestic peace, that she could imagine no unholy disturbance near, and was almost persuaded to believe her alarm to have been a mere nightmare dream.

She opened the connecting door between the parlor and Mr. Horne's chamber, and there——!

Heavens and earth! what a vision was that which met her appalled gaze, froze the very blood in her veins, and almost turned her form to stone!

Down on his face, with his limbs doubled under him as no living man's ever were, and his hair wet with blood, lay old Hugh Horne upon the chamber floor. Spots of blood were tracked from the bed to the window, and thence to the door. Five fingers of an outstretched, bloody hand, as if suddenly dashed there, were marked upon the whitewashed wall! Signs of a dread struggle for life were visible everywhere about the room!

Simultaneously with this awful spectacle, the panic-stricken girl caught a momentary glimpse of the figure of a man escaping through the open window!

For one instant she stood transfixed with horror, and then—rushing to the old man, she raised the poor, gray head, that helplessly fell back upon her arm, revealing the ghastly gash across the throat, and the pale, ashen face, quivering in the last death-agony!

"Oh, God! my God! who hath done this?" she cried.

The convulsed eyelids flared back, the twitching lips opened, and in spasmodic syllables uttered a name that deprived Alice of the last remnant of reason—then closed forever in death.

Bursting from the room, she rushed out into the night, waking all the mountain echoes with her terrific screams.

In five minutes the farm laborers were aroused, and in seven they were on the scene of action. The party consisted of Mr. Hayhurst, the steward, and all the servants, men and women.

They hurried into the chamber of the tragedy, and

then ensued a scene that baffles all attempts at description.

Old servants knelt over their dead master, mourning and weeping with despair. Women screamed in terror. Some of the elder women wished to raise the murdered man and lay him upon his bed, but Mr. Hayhurst, assuming the direction of affairs, forbade them to move him or to meddle with anything in the room until the arrival of the coroner.

Then the steward proceeded to send a mounted messenger to rouse and fetch Dr. Horne; another to Llyndell to request the presence of Colonel North; a third to Bleakton to summon the coroner, and a fourth to the village inn to bring Mr. Mostyn, if, perchance, he should not as yet have started on his journey.

So far the course of Hayhurst was as judicious as it possibly could be. Each summons sent forth was quickly complied with, and the parties arrived as promptly as time and distance would permit them to do.

First came Colonel North, who reached the scene at about four o'clock; a few moments after him Gerald Mostyn, pale and horror-stricken at what had occurred; then arrived Dr. Horne, who appeared overwhelmed with sorrow and indignation; and last of all the coroner, with a number of men from the village, whom he had summoned to act as jurymen.

Then, a few minutes after sunrise, the jury was empanelled and the investigation began. The premises were carefully examined and the witnesses summoned.

First Alice Owen was called; but she was not in the room, nor in the house, nor in the steward's cottage, nor in any of the laborers' huts, nor anywhere about the premises, where she was long and vainly sought.

While the messengers were in quest of her, other witnesses were examined.

Gerald Mostyn was called, who testified to leaving the deceased in his usual state, quietly and comfortably in bed, at ten o'clock the previous night; the only other person to his knowledge in the house at that time being Alice Owen. Mr. Mostyn further deposed that, having left a valuable document behind in the house, and having missed the paper on his arrival at Bleakton, he was hastening back to recover it when he was met by the messenger with the terrible news of the murder.

The next witness was Dr. Horne, who testified to no fact of importance. He had, at four o'clock the day previous, left the deceased in his usual poor health, and in company with his grandson, Mr. Mostyn, and his ward, Miss Owen.

The third witness was the overseer, Mr. Hayhurst, who deposed that soon after two o'clock in the morning he had been roused from sleep by a violent knocking at his door, accompanied by the most appalling shrieks; that he had started up and opened the door, when in rushed Alice Owen in a state bordering on distraction; that he gathered, rather from her terrified looks and frantic exclamations than from any connected story, that her guardian had been assassinated in his chamber; that, immediately, accompanied by the farm laborers, who had also been aroused by her shrieks, and who came hurrying up, he hastened to the house, where he found the deceased lying murdered, the window open, and all the things in the same state in which afterward the coroner also found them; that he had lost no time in summoning the proper persons.

Mr. Hayhurst was the last person examined; for the others were incapable of giving evidence, and the only other witness, Alice Owen, could not be found.

So, after another hour passed in sifting the testimony

and examining the mute evidence of the still life in the chamber, the jury made up their verdict:

"Hugh Horne was murdered by a person or persons unknown."

And as it was then ten o'clock, the coroner and his jury dispersed in quest of breakfast to their several homes.

Gerald Mostyn, as heir-at-law, remained at the house and took the direction of affairs. At his invitation, Dr. Horne stayed to assist him. Even Colonel North, forgetting his former antagonism, or remembering that Mr. Mostyn was possibly now the heir of millions, kindly offered his services, which Gerald, for Constance's sake, frankly accepted.

But before noon that day the news of the murder was widely spread, and the whole community thrilled as with one heart at the perusal of the tale!

Late in the afternoon Alice Owen was found wandering in the woods in a state of fever and delirium. She had rambled far from home, and was picked up in the neighborhood of the parsonage, where Mrs. Osborne, with a sisterly kindness, took her in and nursed her.

On the fourth day from that of his death, the funeral of Hugh Horne took place. It was attended by a larger concourse of people than had ever assembled in that part within the memory of man. They were drawn together by the unprecedented interest of the occasion.

After the funeral, upon the asseveration of Dr. Horne and Mr. Sprole, the Bleakton lawyer, that a will had been made in favor of the former, the alleged instrument was everywhere sought, but in vain. No will of any description was to be found.

And after considerable delay, Gerald Mostyn entered as heir-at-law into his possessions. Not wishing to alienate his patrimonial estate of Radnor's Ruin, he warned

the tenant, Dr. Horne, that at the close of his term of lease he should be required to give up the premises. But at the same time Gerald Mostyn acted with characteristic magnanimity, and gave his cousin a deed of Horne's Hole, with the farm attached.

Besides this gift, Mr. Mostyn would have settled a comfortable independence upon Alice Owen, who, by the death of her guardian, was left quite destitute.

But the orphan girl, without making the slightest acknowledgment of the kindness of that intention, and even with deep horror, absolutely refused to accept the least assistance from him.

Every one who knew of this event thought her manner of refusing aid from him, to say the least of it, ungracious; but they attributed it to nervous excitement, and excused her upon account of her recent illness, while——

Alice—shuddered and kept her own counsel.

But Mr. Gerald Ross Mostyn was now an eminent character. As a rising statesman, a wealthy capitalist, and a landed aristocrat, he was considered a desirable match even for Miss Constance Wynne, and before his return to London he was invited to dinner by her proud uncle. Then again, he met his beloved, but with subdued joy, for he felt that while all was brightly changed for them, at what an awful price had been purchased their present happiness.

CHAPTER XI.

Bring flowers, fresh flowers, for the bride to wear.
They were born to blush in her shining hair.
She is leaving the home of her childhood's mirth;
She is bidding adieu to her father's hearth.
Her place is now by another's side.
Bring flowers for the locks of the fair young bride.
—Mrs. Hemans.

Since the mysterious murder of the miser, twelve months had passed away, and yet not the slightest clew had been discovered to the perpetrators of that heinous crime.

Gerald Mostyn, in default of the existence of a will, remained in quiet possession of his grandfather's estate.

Dr. Horne, whose lease had not yet expired, continued to reside at Radnor's Ruin, to practice his profession, and "win golden opinions from all sorts of people."

But what was most strange, his lovely young wife, from the day of the miser's dreadful death, had fallen into the profoundest state of despondency, that so affected her health as to make the constant attendance of an intelligent nurse absolutely necessary to her safety.

Alice Owen, having resolved, rather than lead a life of idleness and dependence, to earn her bread by any honest occupation, however humble, willingly accepted the situation as attendant upon the invalid lady, and now resided at Radnor's Ruin.

Gerald Mostyn had grown in favor with earth and heaven. His position as the most eminent of the rising young statesmen of the day was universally acknowledged; his rank as one of the most important members of the landed and money aristocracy of the State was

fully established; but "sweeter still than this, than that, than all," to him—his relation as the accepted lover, and affianced husband of Constance Wynne, was openly recognized.

Christmas approached, at which holy and happy season the marriage was appointed to be solemnized.

Christmas eve was a delightful winter day, clear and cold, with a crisp frost; the ground was covered with snow, lightly frozen, and affording good traveling, and therefore promising a large number of guests, even from a distance.

And, in fact, as early as nine o'clock in the morning carriages full of company began to arrive.

At this hour the younger ladies were all invisible, being closeted with the milliners in the room adjoining the bride's chamber, engaged in putting the finishing touches to their costume.

But Mrs. Horton was in the drawing-room below-stairs to receive her guests. And her woman, Evans, was in waiting to attend them to their several chambers.

The elegantly furnished breakfast-room was not as yet thrown open.

Mr. Mostyn and his friend Mr. Brent were expected to meet the bride at ten o'clock, when the marriage ceremony was to be solemnized at the parish church, and to be followed by a breakfast at Llyndell.

The two younger Misses Horton were to be the attendants of the bride; and Mr. Brent and Dr. Heath were to be those of the bridegroom. The bishop of the diocese, who was on a visit to Christ Church parsonage, for the purpose of confirming the younger members of the church, was to perform the marriage ceremony. Colonel North was to give away the bride.

At ten o'clock all was ready. The spacious drawing-rooms, superbly furnished, and beautifully adorned, were

filled to overflowing with a distinguished company. The hall was crowded with attendants; and the lawn around the house covered with coaches, gigs and saddle horses.

In her chamber, Constance Wynne, with soul overflowing with love and gratitude to God, sat and mused, until the sudden opening of the door and the fluttering entrance of her two bridesmaids, who had just put the finishing touches to their own rich toilets, and now appeared in full dress of white satin, blond lace, pearl necklaces, and wreaths of half-blown white roses.

"Constance, are you ready? Are you ready, Constance?" they simultaneously inquired.

"Ready? Yes, and 'almost waiting.'"

"Then, madam," said Lily, with a mock courtesy to her cousin, "the bridegroom and his friends are ready to attend you to church."

And Constance, with a "smile on her lip," and a prayer in her heart, left her maiden bower, and, followed by her bridemaids, descended the stairs.

Waiting in the hall below was a group of gentlemen, consisting of Mr. Mostyn, conspicuous above them all by his commanding stature and really kingly countenance; Dr. Heath, whose intellectual and melancholy face was lighted up by unusual admiration; Mr. Brent, a tall, handsome man; and, finally, Colonel North, who, remembering that the Londoner was a stranger, brought him forward immediately and presented him in turn to the ladies.

One glance of involuntary admiration this gentleman cast upon the bride, and then, bowing profoundly, gave his arm to Miss May Horton, and led her to the carriage. Dr. Heath, with a cordial salutation to the whole party, drew the gloved fingers of Miss Lily over his broadcloth sleeve, and followed the first couple.

Then Constance and Gerald met, and for a single instant spoke together.

They had not seen each other for months, and now but a few syllables could be uttered in the few moments afforded while they were passing from the foot of the stairs to the door of the hall. But these few words were freighted with their hearts' love.

"My Constance! my adored bride!" he exclaimed, in a voice subdued but thrilling with impassioned earnestness, as he pressed and drew her hand within his arm, "my worshiped one! my queen! are you not? are you not?"

"I am your wife, happier in that dear name than I could be in any title, were titles for me!" she answered, in a tone deeply vibrating with a love too pure, profound, and passionate for dissembling.

"My own, own wife!"

"For life, and death, and eternity!"

They had now come up with their attendants, where the whole party separated and entered their several carriages.

CHAPTER XII.

All things that we ordained festival
Turn from their office to black funeral;
Our instruments to melancholy bells;
Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast;
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change;
Our bridal flowers to deck a buried corpse:
All things change them to the contrary.

—SHAKESPEARE.

They reached the church, which was already filled with an expectant congregation.

Amid a general murmur of admiration the bridal *cortége* entered, passing in pairs through the narrow passage opened for them through the crowd, and took their station, forming a semi-circle in the cleared space before the bishop, who, book in hand, stood ready to officiate.

And now, while every pair of eyes in the church was fixed and strained upon the wedding crescent, the bishop opened the book, and, amid a profound silence, by some strange fatality commenced reading—oh, direful omen—the service for the burial of the dead!

But at the same instant that the solemn words fell upon the ears of the bridal pair, thrilling their bosoms with strange prophetic dread, and before the sound could reach the senses of more distant hearers, he had, with prompt presence of mind, corrected his mistake, and while the giggling bridemaids were hiding their mirth behind their fans or pocket handkerchiefs, he fairly launched into the marriage ritual.

The solemn adjuration was made, the prayers offered, the questions proposed, and the vows registered. Colonel North, as by previous arrangement, gave away the

bride, and Gerald Mostyn placed upon her finger the binding ring, the symbol of eternity; then the exhortation was pronounced, the benediction given, and Gerald and Constance were declared, in the sight of earth and heaven, man and wife!

Friends crowded around to kiss the bride and shake hands with the bridegroom; so many friends, so many congratulations were there that it was full fifteen minutes before the newly-married pair were permitted to enter their carriage and return to Llyndell to breakfast.

Then the bridal party, Constance leaning on the arm of Mr. Brent, and Miss Horton on that of Mr. Mostyn, and Miss May on Dr. Heath's, led the way to the breakfast-room.

The table, luxurious with edibles, elegant in arrangement, and dazzling with plate, had taxed the utmost skill, taste and resources of the French confectioner and his assistants, and was, of course, quite a triumph of his art.

The company, quite ready to appreciate its many excellences, gathered around the board. Some, indeed, seemed spellbound beside it. Temples and pagodas, Christian and heathen, cornucopias and caskets, boats and bouquets in candy, in jelly, and in fruits, were demolished and consumed; ices melted away, though it was the depth of winter; roasted turkeys, ducks, fowl and game took to themselves wings and flew off. Champagne left long-necked bottles, to become real pain in the heads of short-necked old gentlemen; nuts and jests were cracked; wine and healths were drunk; speeches and fools were made; the feast was prolonged.

Finally the bride's health was proposed, and after the toast was duly honored she retired to change her bridal costume for her traveling dress.

Unperceived by the company, who were still at the height of their enjoyment, Gerald Mostyn quietly with-

drew from the room to the library, where he found Mr. Osborne awaiting him, and where he was soon joined by Colonel North, Dr. Maraudy and the bishop. Very gladly would Mr. Mostyn have avoided this last wine-drinking and speech-making, but custom was despotic, and he was obliged to yield. The wine was poured, the glasses filled and raised, the toast:

"Health, happiness, and long life to Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Mostyn!"

Given and honored.

And then the bridegroom was permitted to bow and retire to change his dress.

They had just reached the foot of the stairs, when a loud ringing of the hall bell aroused not only them but all within the house.

A servant near at hand opened the door to see who the applicant might be.

An officer was standing without, who immediately strode into the hall, "as one having authority," and inquired:

"Is Mr. Gerald Mostyn within?"

"In course, sir," answered David.

"Let him know that there is a person here who wishes to see him."

"Who shall I say asks for him, sir?"

"Tell him—an officer."

"Yes, sir," said the man, hurrying off to inform his master.

But Mr. Mostyn, who had overheard this conversation, now hastened forward, and recognizing an old acquaintance in the sheriff of the county, exclaimed, cheerfully, and without the least suspicion of his errand:

"Why, Harrison, how do you do?"

"Very well, I thank you, Mr. Mostyn. How are you?"

"Very well," returned Gerald, cordially. "You have business with me, my servant said."

"Mr. Mostyn, it is not only a very important, but a very painful business," said the officer, solemnly.

By this time, Mr. Osborne, Colonel North and several others had come up.

"Is the business of such a nature as to demand a private interview?" inquired Gerald.

"No, sir; but its nature is very, very painful."

"Then, in the name of reason, sir, get it over as quickly as possible," exclaimed Gerald, growing anxious.

"Mr. Mostyn, I am forced to the performance of a most obnoxious duty."

"Well, for Heaven's sake, do it, man!"

"Then, Gerald Mostyn, you are my prisoner!" said the sheriff, letting his hand fall upon the shoulder of the bridegroom.

"Your prisoner!" exclaimed the latter, in amazement.

"Prisoner!" echoed all who heard the word.

"Yes, sir—yes, gentlemen; I very much regret to be the bearer of a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Gerald Mostyn."

"Warrant!"

"Arrest!"

"Gerald Mostyn!" simultaneously exclaimed Mr. Osborne, Colonel North, and the bishop, who had now joined the party.

"But, good Heaven! upon what charge?" inquired Colonel North.

"Upon a charge that will doubtless prove unfounded, sir," replied the sheriff, politely.

"But what the demon is it, then?"

"Gerald Mostyn is arrested upon the charge of having twelve months since assassinated his aged relative, Hugh Horne."

"Murder?" questioned Colonel North, in a low, deep, stern voice.

"Patricide!" muttered the bishop, turning pale with horror.

"Gerald Mostyn!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, in indignant incredulity.

As for the accused, after the first involuntary start of astonishment, he stood pale, calm and motionless as a statue.

"It is certainly a monstrous charge, from which, doubtless, Mr. Mostyn's innocence will come forth as gold from the furnace," said the sheriff, conciliatingly; "but in the meantime, gentlemen, you must see the necessity of my performing my duty."

"Good Heaven, this affair will become known to our guests! Osborne, good friend, pray close the doors of the drawing-room, while I send these lounging rascals about their business," said Colonel North, in a low and confidential tone, as he stepped quickly from the scene of action, and sent four or five loitering men-servants from the hall through the back door.

Mr. Osborne had complied with the request that had been made of him.

But it was too late! Already the rumor that the bridegroom, Gerald Mostyn, was arrested upon the charge of murder, was spreading in fearful whispers, and eliciting low, horror-fraught exclamations through the company in the saloon. Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, unconscious of this, returned to the spot where they had left Mr. Mostyn, the bishop and the sheriff.

"What is to be done now?" inquired Mr. Osborne.

"Gentlemen, I regret to say that Mr. Gerald Mostyn will have to go with me."

"You cannot mean it?"

"Unfortunately, yes, sir; I have a couple of bailiffs

with a carriage and horses waiting without to take him away."

"But, for Heaven's sake, tell us, then, upon what ground—upon whose accusation—has this warrant been issued."

"Sir, I cannot inform you. All I know is that about two hours since I was summoned to the house of Mr. Judson, who put that warrant into my hands, with directions to serve it immediately. I took it, procured a carriage and horses, and the assistance of two officers, and came directly hither. And now, gentlemen, I hope that no obstacle will be thrown in the way of my performance of this duty."

"Sir, I am ready to attend you," said Gerald Mostyn, now speaking for the first time since his arrest, and with complete self-possession.

The sheriff then stepped to the door and beckoned the driver of the carriage to draw up. Gerald Mostyn took his cloak from the friendly hands of Mr. Osborne, who had gone to fetch it, and who now assisted him to put it on, took his hat and gloves in his hands, and stood waiting to enter the carriage.

But just then the doors of the saloon were suddenly thrown open, and the excited crowd of guests, unable any longer to bear suspense, came pouring out into the hall, where they found their worst fears realized—Gerald Mostyn actually, upon the charge of murder, in custody of the sheriff.

It was terrible to witness the scene of consternation that ensued—the amazement of the company, the distraction of the family, the hysterical sobs and cries of the young girls—and, last of all—for she was the very last in the house to hear the news—the fatal grief of Mrs. Horton, who, too feeble to bear the sudden, crushing

blow, sunk to the floor and was carried, in a state of insensibility, to her chamber.

In the midst of all this amazement, confusion and distress, Gerald Mostyn, in charge of the sheriff, departed—one insupportable thought in his head—one almost irrepressible cry upon his lips:

"Oh, Constance! Constance! Oh, my three hours' bride! who shall tell you this?"

CHAPTER XIII.

Oh! what was love made for, if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through glory and shame?
Through the furnace unshrinking thy steps to pursue,
And shield thee, and save thee, or perish there too!

—MOORE.

Let us return to the bereaved bride.

When she quietly withdrew from the breakfast-room, Mrs. Osborne and Mrs. Horton met her in the hall, where the old lady took the newly-married maiden to her aged bosom, prayed God to bless her in the union with the husband of her choice, pressed a kiss upon her brow, and bade her good-by.

Mrs. Osborne then conducted Constance down the hall, to the last door on the left-hand side, where they found Lily Horton and the matronly waiting-woman, Evans, in attendance.

Evans, with a low courtesy, opened the door, and they all entered her chamber.

When her zealous attendants had put away the bride's splendid wedding dress, and veil, and wreath, and jewels, and put on her a rich traveling dress of gray cashmere, and placed her bonnet on her head, they embraced and kissed her; her nurse, Evans, lifted her hand to her lips, and, bursting into tears, prayed God that her dear young lady's married life might be as happy as her maiden life had been good; and so they all withdrew, leaving Constance to compose herself before her departure.

Constance Wynne—nay, Constance Mostyn—sat and mused while the moments glided by. The sound of the revelry, in soft murmurs, occasionally met her ear. The

footsteps of passers in the hall sometimes arrested her attention.

At last the commanding step of one which she would have recognized amid ten thousand other steps made her heart bound, her cheek flush and her breath stop, as she listened, but without approaching her door he passed upstairs, and she breathed freely, smiled softly to herself, and sank back into her chair.

A few minutes passed and then the same well-known step came lightly down the stairs.

And while she held her breath and listened—smiling, blushing, waiting—the hall doorbell was loudly rung.

"A messenger for some one of the guests," was the silent interpretation of Constance.

She heard the door opened, and the subdued sound of voices, but paid little attention, for, half in hope and half in dread, she was listening to catch again the sound of those beloved footsteps that had paused somewhere in the hall. There was an increasing though still a half-suppressed excitement in the passageway.

"Some one is departing," she thought.

She listened longer, still for that one footstep which came not back. There was an ever-augmenting commotion without, the sound of many people hurrying to and fro and eagerly conversing, though still in subdued tones.

"The company is breaking up," she said to herself.

But the confusion was extending. Many persons hurried down the hall. The door of Mrs. Horton's chamber, immediately opposite to her own, was thrown open, and some one was borne in thither.

"A lady has fainted," concluded Constance, with an impulse to rush out to the relief of the supposed sufferer, which was only checked by the sudden recollection that the swooning woman, whomsoever she might be, had every sort of attention she could possibly require.

All this while the guests were heard departing.

At length the excitement began gradually to subside.

At last all was silent.

Still Constance, reclining in her easy-chair, with her half-veiled eyes and soft smile, mused and listened. Why came not back that footstep?

Ah! who should tell her?

The clock struck five. Constance started at the sound.

"So late! How exceedingly strange that he should be still absent!" she thought.

Just then there came a rap at the door. It was not his rap—instinct told her that at once. So, with surprise, she answered:

"Come in."

Mrs. Osborne, pallid, trembling, troubled, opened the door and entered.

"In the name of Heaven, what is the matter?" exclaimed Constance, alarmed at her appearance.

"Oh, Constance, Constance, my dear!" cried the lady, approaching and sinking into the nearest chair.

Constance arose, pale but self-possessed, saying, in a firm, calm, steady tone:

"Some misfortune has occurred; tell me at once what is its nature."

"Oh, my dear—Gerald!"

"Oh, my Saviour! Gerald! What of him?" exclaimed Constance, losing some portion of her self-control.

"Oh, my dear—my dear! how shall I ever break it to you?"

"Speak—speak! Gerald—you said Gerald!" exclaimed Constance, growing frightfully pale, and grasping the back of her chair for support.

"Oh, Constance, Constance! prepare yourself! prepare yourself!"

"Heaven! will you tell me, or shall I have to rush out

to seek for information?" exclaimed the bride, starting forward toward the door.

Mrs. Osborne sprung up and intercepted her, saying, as she forced her to resume her seat:

"Constance, sit down. I will tell you everything. Only compose yourself—be a woman."

"Then, on your life—on your soul—do not keep me an instant longer on the rack! Speak—oh, speak! Gerald! what has happened to him?"

"Oh, my child! Gerald Mostyn has been arrested."

"Arrested!" echoed Constance, in even more wonder than terror, for her worst fear, that of his death, was relieved; "arrested, did you say?"

"Yes, yes."

"Arrested! good Heaven! But upon what possible pretext? He was not in debt."

"Oh, my dear! my dear! he was not arrested for debt."

"For what, then? Mrs. Osborne, you agonize me."

"No, no, Constance; I save you all I can."

"For what has my husband been arrested? Speak! answer me to the point, or I go to——"

"Hear it from ruder lips. Constance, listen and be strong. Your husband has been arrested for—murder!"

"Murder! Oh, God!" cried Constance, covering her face with both hands, and sinking back in her chair.

A pause of several dreadful moments intervened, and then, in a low, sepulchral voice, she said:

"Tell me more—tell me all. With whose—murder—has he been so falsely, so insanely charged?"

"Oh, Constance, with that of Mr. Hugh Horne—twelve months since."

"With the murder of his grandfather! Oh, Heaven of Heavens!" cried Constance, nearly overwhelmed with horror, as she fell back in her chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"My dear Constance, we do not know upon what grounds this charge has been made; but, of course, we do not believe it to be true."

"Believe it! Perish the soul so base as to believe such an impossibility of Gerald Mostyn!" broke forth Constance, in indignant reply.

"My dear, I hope nobody does."

"Where is he now?"

"Constance, it could not be helped. Everything was done to prevent it; but the sheriff——"

"Where is my husband? Will you tell me, or shall I go forth to seek him?"

"Constance, Constance, have patience, my dear. He was taken off to——"

"To——"

"The county jail, my child."

"The county jail! Oh, saints in heaven! must that be his lodgings to-day?"

"It could not be prevented, my dear."

"Oh, madam, madam! you call yourself my friend, and yet, while I lingered here awaiting him, you suffered my husband to be carried off to prison, without coming to warn me, that I might have seen him before his departure; that I might, perhaps, have been permitted to go with him. Oh, Mrs. Osborne, Mrs. Osborne, was that the part of a friend?" cried Constance, bitterly.

"Yes, my dear, that was the part of a friend, although you may not consider it so. Constance, we did not wish you to be exposed, as, had you been informed of what was going on, your agitation must have exposed you to the gaping wonder of the crowd," replied the minister's wife, conciliatingly.

"Oh, cruel, cruel, cruel! But I, to remain here in vain lamentations, am just as cruel. Mrs. Osborne, the bell-

rope is within your reach; will you do me the favor to pull it?"

"Certainly, my dear. But, Constance, what do you want?"

"My maid to order the coachman to put the horses to the carriage immediately."

"Why, Constance, my dear girl, what do you want with the carriage at this time of day?" asked the lady, in astonishment.

"To follow my husband; for 'whithersoever he goes, there will I go,'" answered the bride, calmly.

"But, my dear girl, he has gone to the county prison at Gwyn."

"Then to the county prison at Gwyn I go."

"But, my dear, Gwyn is twelve miles off."

"And if it were twelve thousand, I should set forth."

"Good gracious, Constance, it is six o'clock, and quite dark."

"And if it were midnight, in the midst of a storm, I should set forth without a moment's hesitation. Evans," said she to the woman who answered the bell, "go and order David to put the chestnut pair to my brougham, and then return here."

"Yes, madam," answered the woman, wondering at this unseasonable order, as she had wondered at other events that had taken place that evening, without daring to make a comment.

Constance, with the help of her waiting-woman, hastily completed her preparations to depart.

"Good-by, Mrs. Osborne. I leave you to explain my absence to any inquirers."

"When will you be back, Constance?"

"I know not. When God wills."

"Oh, that Colonel North were here!" said the minis-

ter's wife to herself, as she saw Constance enter her carriage and drive off.

But Colonel North, who was doubtless in the house or about the premises, could not just at this juncture be found.

And so, unmolested, Constance Mostyn pursued her journey to the village of Gwyn.

It was during this solitary night ride through the thick forest and the dismal mountain gorges, that the astrologer's fell prediction, now in part so strangely fulfilled, first recurred to her mind, adding its own superstitious gloom and terror to her real sorrows. But blaming herself for this credulity, and summoning her Christian faith, she mentally exclaimed:

"God reigns, and I appeal from the Egyptian's fatal prophecy to His omnipotent love and wisdom."

CHAPTER XIV.

And where is he, that tower of strength,
Whose fate with hers for life was joined?
How beats his heart, once honor's throne,
How high has soared his daring mind.
—THOMAS DUNN ENGLISH.

Christmas day; but what a Christmas day for Gerald Mostyn!

He arose from the rude bed in his prison cell, and opened the little window to admit the fresh morning air.

Through the grating he looked out across the country to the distant hills whose summits were white with snow, and flushed with salmon color on the eastern sides from the coming sun.

Then his eyes sank down upon the village street beneath his window, which was beginning to be astir with early pedestrians and country wagons.

Just across from the prison was the village hotel, whose upper rooms were on a level with his cell. On the right of the hotel was the village post office, and on the left a physician's office, bearing the sign, "Dr. Heath."

Gerald Mostyn gazed upon the scene, as seeing it not. His thoughts were far away.

"Constance! Constance! How breaks this day to her? How fares she now? Who will comfort her?" were the perpetually recurring questions of his mind.

While thus he sorrowfully gazed and mused, the sound of wheels arrested his attention—because they were not those of the heavy, springless, noisy farm wagons that so often rattled and rebounded past, but of the smoothly revolving ones of the comfortable family coach; looking down, he saw a close carriage of dark green, drawn by a

pair of fine, thoroughbred chestnut horses. Recognizing this equipage as belonging to Llyndell, and murmuring the name of "Colonel North," he was about to retire from the window, when the carriage drew up at the gate, and before the coachman could leave his seat the door flew open and Constance alighted. Though this was earlier than the hour for opening, she apparently found no difficulty in gaining admittance, for in a few moments he heard steps approaching along the corridor, and in another instant his door was unlocked and Constance in his cell and his arms.

Tom Turner, the turnkey, who let her in, had closed the door and retired.

For a few moments he held her clasped to his bosom in silence, while she wept upon his shoulder; and then:

"Constance—my own, own Constance! how I thank you for this!" he said, straining her to his heart.

"Thank me? Oh, why? It was my blessed privilege to come to you," she exclaimed, in a voice thrilling with emotion, as she lifted her head from his shoulder, and met his look of passionate love.

"But, dear wife! sweet wife!" he murmured, softly smoothing back the dark, waving tresses from her white brow, "how pale you are! You cannot have slept at all!"

"Oh! Did you think I could, and you—here?"

"And to come to me so early this morning, you must have traveled through the darkest hours of the night."

"I did! I did! Ah! did you think I could do otherwise? But that was nothing—nothing! Now, I am with you, thank God!" she said, fervently, taking her handkerchief from her pocket and wiping the tears from her eyes.

"I wish I had not wept," she continued, "I intended to be calm; for, after all, dear Gerald, though this affair

is very trying to us, yet it must be over in a few hours. The examination before the magistrate takes place, I am told, at ten o'clock this morning. And this charge against you is so very unreasonable, so exceedingly preposterous—nay, indeed, if it were not for the awful nature of the crime, I should say so supremely ridiculous—that it will not bear a moment's calm investigation."

Gerald might have told her that, irrational as the accusation really was, unsupported as it might prove, and speedily discharged as probably he should be, yet the stigma of the charge must rest upon him forever, or until the real criminal should be discovered.

Hearing footsteps approaching, he strained her once more to his bosom, pressed an impassioned kiss upon her lips, and released her from his close embrace.

It was the warden come to inform the prisoner that the sheriff had arrived to attend him to the magistrate's office.

"My dearest love, where shall I dispose you?" inquired Mr. Mostyn, as he arose and awaited the entrance of the sheriff.

"Dispose me? On your arm; by your side; I cannot leave you, Gerald," replied Constance, rising and putting her hand in his.

"My own dearest Constance, how I thank you; but this must not be, love! A magistrate's office is no place for a delicate woman."

"And this is no time, God knoweth, for fantastic delicacy!" exclaimed Constance, hurriedly; then, in a slower tone and with deeper feeling, she added: "A wife's place is beside her husband in his trouble, wherever he may be! I would remain with you through all, until you are well over this trial. Dearest Gerald, do not send me from you!"

"But, sweet wife, you really must not accompany me to such a place."

She opened her lips to speak again, and then paused, and looked silently and tenderly in his face a moment, before saying:

"Ah! do not tell me so! Remember, I am bound to obey you now—a sweet, sweet bondage, that I love to feel, to which I delight to yield; only do not command me now away from your side, for if you do I shall be obliged to go, and that would deeply, deeply pain my heart!"

"It is for your own sake, dearest Constance, that I would have you leave me now."

"Then, for my own sake, let me go with you!" pleaded Constance.

"Be it so, my generous love—be it so," he said, drawing her to his bosom in an earnest embrace.

Two minutes afterward the sheriff appeared and conducted them to the magistrate's office.

Among the persons present were the witnesses who had been examined at the coroner's inquest. Besides these were Mr. Osborne and Colonel North, who met and shook hands with the accused, and who also looked very much surprised on beholding his bride by his side.

A seat was given the accused immediately in front of the magistrate's table.

And amid a profound and almost breathless attention, the investigation commenced.

First the witnesses who had given testimony before the coroner's inquest were examined. Their evidence on the former occasion being already known to the reader, need not be repeated.

A question immediately arose as to where Alice Owen could be found.

A voice answered that she was an inmate of the family of Dr. Horne.

Then Dr. Horne arose, and said that the young lady had left his house the preceding day in a very mysterious manner, and had not since been heard from.

The magistrate, upon hearing this, directed the officer to take the subpœna, and institute a search, deciding in the meantime that the examination should proceed. Up to this time no testimony in the slightest degree reflecting upon the prisoner, or justifying his arrest, had been elicited. And people had begun to shrug their shoulders, when——

"Let John Hounsloe take the stand," said the clerk.

In answer to this summons, a little, wiry, dark-skinned man, clad in a shooting jacket, and known throughout the country as an old sportsman, came forward.

The oath having been administered in the usual form, the clerk said:

"Be so good, Hounsloe, as to state to the justice all that you know in regard to the case in hand."

The witness looked around upon the group crowding behind him, cleared his throat, fixed his eyes upon the magistrate, and commenced.

"You see, yer worship, I were out yesterday 'long o' my dogs a-shooting in the piece o' woods in Horne's Hole, just 'atween the point where the two mount'ins join. I'd been out 'most all the best part o' the day, and got perty well lo'den down with game, so, as it got towards the arternoon, I began to think 'bout home, which lay on the tother side o' the mount'in, and it to cross. So I was jest a gwine to whistle the dogs to heel, when I saw 'em jest 'bout a couple o' hundred yards afore me, right at the foot o' the ridge, p'nting something as was in a crevice o' the rocks, or the side o' the ridge, I couldn't tell which. But thinking as it was a hanimal o'

some sort, I jest cocked my gun, and creeped along till I got near enough—when I sez:

"'What's it, dogs—good dogs?' sez I.

"But they only whined, and guv out sharp, suddint barks, and pawed away like among the dried furze and cedar bushes and broken rocks that crowded all the foot of the range, and choked up the hole where they had p'inted.

"Thinks I, it's a somethink. So I drew the charge out'n my gun, and put in a heavier load, and watched and waited, keeping my eyes fixed upon the hole, and my gun and my ears both cocked. But I couldn't hear nor see no livin' creature 'cept 'twas the dogs, as still continered to bark and scrape away like thunder. And presently down come a piece o' broken rock, and then another. Then the foremost dog—the setter as I bought from Dr. Horne—pushed himself about half way in the hole, and began to drag at something from within.

"'It's no hanimal, nor nothink else alive,' sez I, and I creeped nigh, when the dog, with a great shake of his head and a strong pull, dragged out a stout bundle, half undid in pulling it through. So I took the thing from the dog and unrolled it, and seen how it was a good suit o' cloth clothes, jest as dry and nice as if it wer jest put away there. Well, I was jest debatin' in my mind whether I should take it home, or whether I hadn't better put it back, in case the real owner had put it there for safe keeping, when I noticed the velvet cuff of the right sleeve all splotched with thick, gummy stains, like dark-red wax. The right breast o' the coat, and the right leg o' the pants, jest above the knee, was splotched with the same stuff, jest as if it had been spurted on 'em. It kinder made my heart stand still, though I wa'n't quite sure what it was.

"In a sorter awe, I begun to s'arch the pockets, and

out'n the inside breast pocket I drawed a packet, as when I unrolled, it didn't take any better scholar nor myself to see, was old dockerments o' some sort, which, not being college bred, I couldn't head nor tail on. S'arching the other pockets, I found a razor, rusted and stuck together and a white pocket han'kercher, gummed together with the same dark stuff, and havin' of a name on it as I couldn't make out, and last of all, a little book with ivory leaves and tortoise-shell covers, writ all over with su'thing as much Greek and Latin to me as the pocket han'kercher and the dockerment was.

"Then all of a suddint, while lookin' at the things—'specially at the stained clothes, the razor, and the dockerment—I memorized the murder of Mr. Hugh Horne, and the talk o' the missing will, and thinking this had something to do with that, I rolled up the things together ag'in and called the dogs, and sot off fast as I could go through the woods and 'cross the country to this place, where I tuk the things right up to Constable McNab, who examined them, and—Constable McNab will tell you the rest," concluded the witness.

"Let Alexander McNab take the stand," said the clerk.

In response to the summons, a tall, raw-boned, red-headed man, of Caledonian origin, advanced. Being duly sworn, he said:

"Your worship, at seven o'clock last evening, the last witness came to my house, bringing the bundle of clothes which he has just described, and of the finding of which he gave the same account to me that he did to your worship. We then examined the clothes and the articles found in the pockets. The clothes we were unable to identify, but the name on the handkerchief, gentlemen, was that of 'G. R. Mostyn.'"

"My God!" exclaimed Constance, in a deep, low voice, clasping her hands, and growing deadly pale.

The accused heard this startling evidence with calmness. Indeed, only once had he betrayed any emotion, and that was, as I said, on hearing of the discovery of the clothing.

The frown darkened upon the countenance of Colonel North.

But Mr. Osborne stooped and whispered him:

"Tut! that proves nothing; the handkerchief was most likely picked up by the real murderer, and thrust into his pocket."

The witness proceeded.

"We next examined the razor, on the handle of which was engraved the single name, 'Mostyn.' Then we looked at the tablets, on the cover of which was a small silver shield, adorned with a wreath of laurel, encircling the inscription, 'Constance to Gerald.' Lastly we unfolded the document, which proved to be the will of Mr. Horne, executed in favor of his nephew, Dr. Horne, to whom he bequeathed his whole estate. Rolling the packet up, we took it to your worship, who thereupon issued a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Gerald Mostyn. That is all I have to state, except that the articles are here, subject to the order of your worship."

Gerald Mostyn heard these dreadful disclosures with an unmoved countenance. And Constance, noble Constance, after the first exclamation of anguish had escaped her lips, placed her hand within her husband's, and sat calm, still and firm, though pale as Parian marble.

But it is impossible to describe the consternation with which this terrible testimony was heard by the majority of persons present. They stared in each other's faces in blank dismay, or astonished inquiry, as if to ask: "Are we awake? Do we dream? Is this real?"

The countenance of Colonel North grew dark as doom. He bit his nether lip until the blood started.

Only Mr. Osborne stooped and said:

"Circumstantial evidence! The merest circumstantial evidence. I am no lawyer, but it is easy for me to see through this. Of course, the murderer was also a robber, and purloined those effects of Mr. Mostyn found in the pocket of the hidden clothing."

At this suggestion the darkened countenance of Colonel North slightly cleared. But the examination was proceeding, and their attention was immediately given to that.

"Let the articles in question be produced," said the magistrate.

The constable retired a few steps, took a bundle from a bailiff at hand, and laid it upon the table, where, unrolling it, he displayed the blood-stained clothing and the other items described by the two preceding witnesses, who, being recalled, identified them.

"Let Dr. Horne take the stand," said the magistrate.

Dr. Horne came forward, pale, trembling, tottering, and altogether more agitated than any other person present had yet appeared.

"Dr. Horne, have you ever seen this suit of clothing before?"

"Yes, your worship," replied the witness, in faltering tones.

"Tell us, if you please, in whose possession, and upon what occasion you have seen it."

"I have seen that suit, sir, but once—it was then worn by Mr. Gerald Mostyn at the Christmas dinner given by Mr. Hugh Horne upon the day of his death."

There was a pause of a few minutes, at the end of which the justice, turning toward the prisoner, said:

"Mr. Mostyn, you have heard the testimony against you; what have you to say in defense?"

Gerald Mostyn stooped and whispered to his wife:

"Courage, dear love."

Then pressing her hand, which had all this while remained in his own, he relinquished it, and, rising, in a self-collected manner addressed the magistrate:

"May it please your worship, my arrest last evening, upon the charge of the crime with which I stand accused, filled my mind with the most unqualified astonishment. The whole course of my past life would seem to be a sufficient refutation of such a charge, were not the accusation supported by some strangely pertinent testimony —testimony which I shall proceed to rebut by offering a few facts which may serve to throw some light upon the circumstantial evidence; and from which also I shall draw, and submit to your worship some strong inferences."

Here the prisoner paused for a moment, to arrange his thoughts, while the crowd pressed closely around, gazing upon his face, hanging upon his words. Colonel North walked back to his post near his niece; Mr. Osborne aroused himself from his depression, and both looked and listened with the deepest interest.

"To do this," continued Mr. Mostyn, "I shall be forced to give you, sir, a succinct account of the manner in which my time was passed from the moment I bade adieu to my relative, Mr. Horne, to that when I received the intelligence of his death. Upon the night in question, at ten o'clock, I took leave of Mr. Horne, and went into an adjoining chamber,which had been appropriated to my use, and where I changed my evening dress for a traveling suit. In my haste, for it was late, I transferred nothing except my purse and penknife from the pockets of the former to those of the latter. Having promised to return to Horne's Hole in a very few days, and not wishing to burden myself with a heavy portmanteau, I

hung the suit—in the pockets of which I had inadvertently left a set of tablets, a handkerchief, and perhaps some other trifles—in the chamber, where I left it for my use, upon the occasion of my visit. Then throwing an ample traveling cloak around me, and taking my hat and gloves, I passed through the parlor, where I took leave of Miss Alice Owen, and, departing from the house, mounted the horse that awaited me, and rode rapidly as the mountain path would permit, on toward Bleakton."

Here, for the second time, the accused paused; an earnest thoughtfulness shadowed his brow, as his eyes lowered for a moment upon the form of the noble girl beside him; and then, lifting his head, he continued:

"I confess that, during my ride, as well as during the whole afternoon and evening preceding it, my mind had been much preoccupied. Hence it followed that when I had ridden about three hours, I discovered to my dismay that I had left a very important document behind lying upon the mantelshelf of my chamber. As its recovery was absolutely necessary, I turned my horse's head, and was riding back when met by the messenger with the intelligence of the murder of Mr. Horne. It may be easily imagined that the sudden news of this awful event shocked all other ideas from my mind. Putting spurs to my horse, regardless of the dangers of the descent, I dashed down the declivity, and soon reached Horne's Hole, where the bloody corpse of the murdered man met my horror-stricken sight, and confirmed the messenger's story, and where the coroner's inquest, soon afterward met."

Here, for the third time, the prisoner paused for a moment, during which exclamations of—"An ingenious explanation," "Not a satisfactory refutation," "A likely story, indeed," "Wants proof," and so forth, were passed *sotto voce,* among the crowd.

"Among the exciting scenes that followed," continued Mr. Mostyn, "it will be readily believed that I had no time for thoughts of other matters. It was late in the afternoon before I remembered the important document in search of which I had turned back, and which I found just where I had left it. It was days afterward that I discovered the loss of the dress-suit which I had left in my chamber, and for which, indeed, having put on mourning, I had no use. When I missed this suit, I naturally supposed that it had been mislaid; but seeing that it could not be found, I came to the conclusion that it had been purloined by one of the servants, or perhaps by some one among the miscellaneous crowd that had filled the house at the time of the coroner's inquest, and afterward during the funeral. And so, being deeply occupied with more important affairs, I dismissed that matter from my mind. Now, however, recently discovered circumstances constrain me to draw another deduction from the theft of the clothing, and to conclude that that suit was stolen, and put on by the murderer, both for the sake of concealing his own identity, and for the purpose of fixing the crime upon another. As for the presence of the missing will in the pocket of the coat, I cannot in any manner account for that circumstance, except upon the hypothesis that that also was purloined by the murderer. Your worship, I have said all that, at present, I have to say upon this subject," concluded the prisoner, as, with a bow, he resumed his seat.

There was a pause, a hesitation, a reluctance, evident on the part of the magistrate, who at length said:

"Mr Mostyn, your defense is very plausible; but your explanation wants proof, in lack of which it becomes my painful duty to commit you for trial before the assizes, now in session at this place."

Then turning to his clerk, the magistrate gave some

directions in a low voice to that functionary, who took up his pen and began filling out a blank form.

"Fear nothing, dear one, fear nothing; for God is with the guiltless," whispered Gerald Mostyn, pressing the hand of his bride, who, pale as monumental marble, had heard this judgment pronounced.

Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, after talking apart for a few minutes, went up to the magistrate, and offered to enter into a recognizance to any amount that should be required for the appearance of the prisoner at court. But the justice reminded those gentlemen that a prisoner accused of a capital crime, the charge supported by strong evidence, was not bailable.

Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, after a little fruitless controversy upon the subject, bowed and fell back a few paces.

The clerk laid the committal before the magistrate, who signed and placed it in the hands of the officer, saying:

"Remove the prisoner."

Then the sitting was adjourned, and the justice arose.

The crowd began to disperse.

Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, though, as a matter of form, or perhaps from a sense of propriety, they had offered bail for the prisoner, now that it was refused, seemed indisposed to approach, or in any manner notice, Gerald Mostyn, to whom no one in that crowd, except Constance, spoke one word of sympathy, comfort or encouragement.

CHAPTER XV.

It cannot bow thy noble soul,
Tho' friends and foes depart;
The car of fate may o'er thee roll.
Nor crush they Roman heart.—MRS. CHILD.

"This way, if you please, sir," said the sheriff, in a cold voice, addressing his prisoner, and preparing to leave the magistrate's office.

Mr. Mostyn pressed the hand of his wife, and, still retaining it in his own, arose and looked around for some proper friend to whose care he might confide her. He naturally first thought of Colonel North; but that gentleman, with a gloomy and abstracted air, was talking to the magistrate. He next looked toward Mr. Osborne; but the minister, with a moody and repellent brow, turned away. Dr. Heath was cold and distant in manner, Dr. Horne freezing in looks.

There was not a man in that assembly who did not believe the prisoner guilty.

Gerald Mostyn, with a keen pang, saw this, and turned his glance down upon the noble girl beside him, whom he had so unconsciously involved in his own misfortunes. She divined his thoughts and feelings, and although so deadly pale, she arose and passed her arm within his, and with a steady voice, said:

"Permit me to go with you, dearest Gerald, and to remain as long as the authorities will allow."

But before Mr. Mostyn could reply, Colonel North left the side of the magistrate, hastened forward, and seized the hand of Constance, saying:

"My dear niece, you must come with me at once. I wish to have some conversation with you."

"With Mr. Mostyn's consent, if you please, uncle," said the lady, withdrawing her hand, and lifting to her husband's face a glance full of devotion, which, perhaps, under happier circumstances, she might not have thought it necessary to display.

"Be it so, then," replied the colonel, ironically. "Mr. Mostyn, with your permission, I would have a few moments' private conversation with my niece."

"Certainly, sir," replied Gerald, with dignity. Then stooping to his wife, he said, gently: "Constance, dear one, go with him. You will know where to find me an hour hence." And placing her hand in that of the colonel, Mr. Mostyn turned to follow the sheriff.

Colonel North led Constance through the back door of the office (which, it will be remembered, was one of the first-floor front rooms of the village hotel), and along a narrow passage, to a private parlor. Placing a chair for her accommodation, he seated himself, and, looking her straight in the face, said:

"Constance Wynne——"

"Constance Mostyn, if you please, uncle," amended the lady, with much dignity.

"Very well; we will not stop to dispute about trifles. Constance Mostyn, then, I am a straightforward man, of few words. As your uncle and guardian, it behooves me to inform you that you are a fool."

"I thank you, uncle, for the intelligence. Self-knowledge is most desirable of all wisdom."

"You need not be sarcastic, Constance; I speak only for your good. Your present circumstances are certainly distressing, but not desperate, although you are disposed to make them so."

"What mean you, uncle?"

"Why this: your case lies in a nutshell. A marriage ceremony was yesterday performed between yourself and a man totally unworthy of you——"

"Uncle!" interrupted the lady.

"Nay, never think to transfix me with your flashing glance, Constance. Being the bride of a morning only, if you conduct yourself with delicacy, discretion and firmness, you may be easily released from your present distressing position."

"Speak plainly, sir. In short, what would you have me do?"

"I would have you put yourself under my protection; return home with me; renounce the name of Gerald Mostyn; disclaim your union with him; resolutely refuse to see him, or to hold any sort of communication with him."

It would be impossible to give any idea of the expression of Constance's noble countenance. The composure that she had enforced upon herself was overwhelmed by the rush of indignation, grief and devotion that sent the blood to her cheeks and the fire to her eyes.

"Angels in heaven!" she exclaimed, in a deep, impassioned voice, "do you hear this old man! this old man, who would have me desert my husband in the hour of his utmost need!"

"Now, then, what mean you by that, girl?" snapped the colonel, impatiently.

"Uncle!" she slowly replied, as her beautiful lip curled with the noble scorn with which a lofty spirit looks upon any kind of meanness, "I am no more capable of the contemptible course to which you counsel me than he was of committing the crime with which he stands accused!"

"In the demon's name, young woman, what is it that you say?" exclaimed the colonel, in rising anger.

"I say, in effect, sir, that I will stand by my husband

as long as we both shall live!" answered the lady, with unflinching courage.

"Death of all the demons, girl! you need a strait-waistcoat and a shower bath. Sit down here! Sit down, I say, at least, and listen to me, before you devote yourself to destruction!" exclaimed the old man, seizing his niece by the wrist, and forcing her into a seat.

"Now, then. You say, in spite of threatened misery, disgrace and ruin, you will stand by the man whom you insanely call your husband?"

"So help me, Heaven, at my utmost need, I will," said Constance, solemnly.

"How, in the meantime, are you to live? His fortune is gone. The missing will is found. He is a beggar."

"My fortune remains," answered the lady.

"It does! But, by the powers! it remains in my hands, where it shall continue for a while."

"Then, when he is acquitted, as he will be, we can both work."

"Ay, but while he is in prison?"

"I can work for him," replied the noble girl.

"You work for him! What can you do, Donna Quixote—you, who never helped yourself to a glass of water, or stooped to pick up your own pocket handkerchief—what can you do?"

"Make shirts, hem handkerchiefs, do anything honest."

"Make shirts? As if people would employ the wife of a felon!"

"Uncle!" interrupted Constance, with startling energy.

"Nay, never flash your eyes at me in that manner. I say that he is a felon!" exclaimed the old man, furiously.

"Sir," said Constance, now speaking slowly, calmly and sternly, though she was white as alabaster, "retract that word, or by all my hopes of heaven, we are strangers henceforth!"

"All the demons in and out of Hades! I will not retract it!" exclaimed the old man, in a fainting voice, as he dropped into a chair, overwhelmed with astonishment at the audacity of Constance.

And before he recovered his self-possession, the lady quietly arose and withdrew from the room.

Constance veiled herself, crossed the street, entered the prison, and in a few moments was admitted to her husband's cell.

Mr. Mostyn was sitting, engaged in writing. He looked up, turned, and held out his arms as she advanced and gently dropped upon his bosom, exclaiming, in low, deep, impassioned tones: "Thine, thine, thine, thine! Oh, fold me fondly, for I am thine own, own, own! I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee—never, never, never! Oh, I do love thee, and honor thee, and trust thee, more than ever woman did man before!"

Closely he pressed her to his bosom, earnestly he answered: "My Constance, my beloved bride! what return can I make thee for all thy devotion? Oh, since this arrest had to be made, would to God it had been made a day earlier, that so it had not involved thee in my ruin!"

"So would not I! God be thanked that since this arrest was destined to be made, it was not made one hour earlier, for thus, at least, it leaves me the privilege, the blessed privilege, the indisputable wife's privilege, of remaining at your side to share, if not to soothe, your sorrows! Oh, my dear, dear husband, amid all the bitterness of this bitter hour, how I thank God for this one sweet mercy!" she exclaimed, dropping her head on his breast.

"But Constance, my devoted wife, pause before you decide. Your only earthly safety may be in leaving me—pause and reflect!" he said, with earnest solemnity.

"Pause! as if I could pause! Oh, 'entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee. The Lord so do to me also if aught but death part thee and me!' " she replied, in the solemn and beautiful words of the Moabitess.

And so through that sad Christmas day, that sorrowful first day of their wedded lives, she remained beside him.

Toward evening the good-hearted jailer came in with a thoughtful suggestion.

"Mrs. Wardour, the governor's wife, has a neat spare bedroom, which is very heartily at the lady's service if she will do us the honor to take it," he said.

With earnest thanks, they accepted the offer, and terms were arranged to the satisfaction of both parties. And thus, by having lodging within the prison inclosure, Constance enjoyed the extraordinary privilege of remaining in her husband's cell up to the latest hour of retirement. Then, having united in evening prayer, the newly-married and most sorrowful pair separated for the night.

Constance, conducted by the turnkey, who waited for her without, went down, and left the prison for the little two-storied house in the same inclosure, that was the jailer's dwelling.

Here she was met by Mrs. Wardour, a little, fat, good-natured woman, of forty years of age, who received her with the most respectful kindness, and conducted her up the little narrow stairs to a small bedchamber, having a single window, curtained with white muslin.

The jailer's little family kept very early hours, so that about the dawn of day Constance was awakened from her restless sleep by the suppressed stir of the little household around her. She immediately arose, for there was much to be done which she wished to complete before the hour of opening the prison, so that she might, if possible, pass all the remainder of the day in her husband's

cell. She quickly made her simple toilet—a plain gray silk dress, with white collar and cuffs, and her dark hair plainly parted over her broad forehead, and gathered in a large roll at the nape of her neck—and was ready to partake of her early breakfast.

Immediately after the morning meal, she dispatched Willie, the son of the warden, to order her carriage and horses from the livery stable where they had been left, as she wished to send to Llyndell for her own and Mr. Mostyn's wardrobes. To her surprise and vexation, the lad returned with the news that her equipage had, on the previous day, been withdrawn and sent home by Colonel North. This event was not more embarrassing in itself than indicative of future petty persecutions of the same sort. With some difficulty, Constance at length procured a messenger with a cart to carry an order to Llyndell for her own and Mr. Mostyn's luggage. And this business dispatched, she went to her husband's cell, where she purposed to spend the day.

During the forenoon Mr. Mostyn made out a brief, which Constance assisted him in transcribing, and copies of which he sent, with retaining fees, to his colleague, Mr. Jones, of London, and to his friend, Mr. Wright, of Edinburgh, accompanied by a request that those gentlemen would, if possible, come down to defend him.

Late in the evening the cart returned from Llyndell with Mr. Mostyn's trunks and boxes. But instead of Constance's luggage, came a note from Colonel North, refusing to send any portion of her personal effects, and commanding her instant return to Llyndell. Now, Constance, who had determined never to disturb the harassed mind of her husband with her own personal vexations, had his luggage quietly brought into the lobby outside of his cell, and, in regard to her own, kept silence. She knew the imperious temper of her guardian, and knew

also that he had no right to detain her personal effects; and these effects, particularly her jewels and pocket-money, she needed very much to pay expenses and provide present comforts. She accordingly formed her plan, and waited for the next morning to put it in execution. Mr. Brent, of the Temple, who had been her husband's first groomsman, was now in town, at the hotel, waiting the leisure of his friend to offer his services for the defense. Early on the third morning, therefore, Constance addressed a note to this gentleman, requesting him to see her at her lodgings. And when he came, she explained her position, and requested him to attend her to Llyndell, whither she wished to go and demand her property. Mr. Brent readily consented; and Constance, with the approbation of Mr. Mostyn, departed under his escort for Llyndell, where she arrived in the afternoon.

But little did the lady anticipate the storm of indignation, invectives and reproaches that was to meet her there. Constance bore these with great composure, firmness and patience—only, at the end of all, quietly requesting to be put in possession of her personal effects. These were for some time refused, until, at the suggestion of Constance, Mr. Brent interfered, reminding the colonel that, in the event of his continued refusal, a suit would be commenced against him, which would not greatly tend to the elevation of his credit. So, finally, by coolness, patience and perseverance, Constance and her advocate conquered. The effects were given up; and, pursued by the evil prophecies of the proud, worldly and imperious family, the lady and her escort set out for Gwyn, which they reached at midnight. Even more than the heavy calamity that hung over her head, did this petty, contemptible, humiliating family warfare distract and depress the mind of the high-spirited girl. She was almost content that the hour was so late when she arrived, that the prison

doors were closed, and that a night must intervene before she could present herself before her husband.

It was but a few days to this date, when quite a sensation was created in town by the arrest of Alice Owen, who was discovered in a mountain gypsy's hut, where she was supposed to be hiding from the subpœna. As it was believed that her testimony would be the most important, and as it was feared that she would again elude the vigilance of the officers, and escape, to avoid testifying, she was required to enter into a recognizance with her securities, Drs. Horne and Heath, for her appearance at the present term of assizes, to give evidence in the approaching trial of Gerald Mostyn for the murder of Hugh Horne.

It was on the third morning succeeding the arrest of Alice Owen, that Messrs. Jones and Wright arrived in town, and after a visit to the cell of the prisoner, with Mr. Brent, adjourned to a private parlor in the hotel, where they had a long consultation, in which it was arranged how the three should conduct the defense.

CHAPTER XVI.

The last, the last, the last—
Last clasp of failing hands—
Last look of fading eyes—
Last words of dying lips.—ANON.

On that January morning the sun arose over a wild winter scene. The snow that had been falling fast for the three preceding days now covered the earth to the depth of two feet. The clouds had all dispersed, and the unblemished whiteness of the ground, under the unveiled radiance of the sunshine, was perfectly dazzling. It was the morning of the trial. Mr. Mostyn arose early, and was soon afterward joined by his wife. They were a handsome, stately, imposing couple as they stood together—he holding her hand, gazing in her face, and murmuring, in grave tones:

"A fortnight ago to-day, dearest Constance, I arose the happiest man in England—for it was to be our wedding day—and now——"

"You are required to be the bravest, as you are assuredly, by one heart at least, the most respected and the best beloved," said Constance, finishing his sentence, with a voice and look of high encouragement.

"May the Lord bless you and reward you, my own heroic wife!"

"May he save us both! And now, while we have the opportunity, let us kneel and pray for His presence in the coming trial."

Soon after their devotions were finished, approaching steps, and a rap at the cell door, followed by the turning of the key, announced the arrival of the sheriff, to conduct the prisoner to the court.

Mr. and Mrs. Mostyn, with their escort, passed unmolested through the crowd to the courthouse, which was situated one square above the prison, on the same side of the street.

It was some time before the constable succeeded in making a way for the prisoner, through the press of people that filled the courtroom, to the place appointed for him.

During the preliminary forms of the trial, Mr. Mostyn remained seated in front of the bench, having his counsel on his right hand, and his wife on his left. He sat with his form erect, his head raised and slightly thrown back, his large cloak falling from his shoulders, his proud gaze calmly regarding the proceedings of the court, or the persons of the spectators. Constance sat still and silent beside him, with her black lace veil dropped before her pale face.

On the bench the celebrated Baron Wold presided.

The attorney-general was the distinguished John Henry Cole; associated with him in the prosecution was the no less eminent Peter Cawdow.

Opposed to them for the defense were Messrs. Jones, Wright, and Brent, all of them rising young barristers, and two of them since of world-wide fame in the science of jurisprudence.

When the preliminaries were over, the prisoner was arraigned by the usual formula, and the indictment—charging Gerald Mostyn, of the County of Denbigh, with the willful and felonious murder of Hugh Horne, of the said county, by the cutting of his throat with a razor, on the morning of the 26th of December, 18—, was read. Then the clerk of the court, addressing the prisoner, asked:

"Gerald Mostyn, how say you—are you guilty or not guilty of the felony with which you are indicted?"

Mr. Mostyn, who was standing with his stately form drawn up to its haughtiest height, his large cloak hanging gracefully from one shoulder, and drawn up on his arm, and his right hand raised, answered calmly, almost scornfully:

"Not guilty."

"How will you be tried?"

"By God and my country," replied the prisoner, with dignity, folding his cloak around him, and resuming his seat.

The prosecuting attorney made a statement of the circumstances that led to the arrest of the prisoner, and with which the reader is too well acquainted to need the repetition here.

At the close of his speech, the attorney-general proceeded to call the witnesses for the prosecution.

During the examination and cross-examination there was a subdued bustle in court. But when the name of Alice Owen was called, and the beautiful girl, clothed in deep mourning, moved slowly forward to the stand, and putting aside her veil, stood with downcast eyes, whose long, black lashes rested upon colorless cheeks, deeply shadowed by thick clouds of ebon ringlets, the silence deepened, the attention became more fixed, the interest more painful. Being sworn, the maiden was addressed by the attorney-general:

"Witness, look upon the prisoner at the bar."

Alice turned, and sent one quick and quickly-withdrawn glance at the face of Gerald Mostyn. The blood rushed in torrents, crimsoning her brows, and then retreating, left it pale as marble; a shudder passed through her whole frame; the perspiration burst in cold drops upon her forehead; she tottered, leaned forward upon the railing for support, and cast an imploring gaze into

the face of the judge. Baron Wold did not speak, but his answering look said, plainly:

"My child, you cannot help yourself, nor can we help you; you must perform your painful duty."

"A glass of water," said Dr. Heath.

A bailiff brought the required refreshment, and the doctor himself pushed forward, and placed it to the lips of the witness, saying, encouragingly:

"My dear Alice, be firm, I entreat you."

She quaffed the water and returned the glass. Dr. Heath retreated, and the attorney-general said:

"Now, witness, you have looked upon the prisoner at the bar; do you know him?"

"I do, sir," answered Alice, in an expiring voice, without raising her eyes from the floor.

"Tell the jury, then, all that you know in regard to this crime for which he stands indicted."

Alice convulsively clasped her hands, threw up an imploring glance at the bench, but, meeting no mercy there, and being again urged by the attorney-general, she proceeded to tell of the fearful scream that awoke her, and how she had rushed down to the parlor and opened the door connecting with Mr. Horne's room.

Here the witness suddenly stopped, shuddered, grew deadly white in the face, sunk in her chair, and dropped her head forward upon the railings.

The attorney-general gave her time; but after a few minutes, inquired:

"Well, witness, what next? When you opened the door connecting with Mr. Horne's chamber, what did you see?"

She raised her head, shivered, and replied, in cold and hollow tones:

"Opposite to the door by which I entered I saw the

open window, which nearly extinguished my light, and a man escaping through it——"

"Did you recognize that man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was it?"

"It was—the prisoner," said the witness, in a dying voice.

Here Gerald Mostyn and Constance started simultaneously, and fixed their eyes in horror upon the young girl, whom they could not believe to be otherwise than most atrociously perjured.

But the pale, suffering, and most holy countenance of the poor maiden proved that whatever her pain might be, it could not be that of remorse.

"Well, what then?" inquired the attorney-general.

"I felt something at my feet—looked down, and—oh, Heaven of heavens!—I saw Mr. Hugh Horne lying doubled up on the floor, with his face and his gray hair in a pool of blood."

"Was he—at the time you first discovered him lying thus—was he quite dead?"

"No, sir; he was not," replied Agnes, with extreme reluctance.

"Did the dying man speak?"

Alice shuddered, but did not answer.

"Witness, remember that you are under oath to tell the whole truth. Did the deceased speak before his death?"

"Yes, sir; he did."

"What did he say?"

"He said: 'Oh, Alice! Gerald Mostyn, my grandson, has done it!' And then his head slipped heavily from my arms, and he was dead—and I——"

Here the last shade of color faded from the very lips of the witness, her eyes closed, her chin dropped, and,

overwhelmed by many emotions, she sank back fainting in the arms of Dr. Heath.

"My God, my God! am I sane or mad?" exclaimed Gerald Mostyn, in a low, deep, thrilling voice, upon hearing this crushing testimony.

"Oh, be courageous! be yourself! Still trust in Heaven!" cried Constance.

CHAPTER XVII.

And he for her had also wept,
  But for the eyes that on him gazed;
His sorrow, if he felt it, slept;
  Stern and erect his brow was raised;
Whate'er the grief his soul avowed,
He would not shrink before the crowd;
But yet he dared not look on her;
Remembrance of the hours that were—
His love, his pride, his present state—
His earthly, his eternal fate—
And hers—oh, hers!—he dared not throw
One look upon her deathlike brow!
Else has his rising heart betrayed
Despair for all the wreck there made.—BYRON.

Upon the retirement of the last witness, the court adjourned until ten o'clock the next day. Then the sheriff presented himself to conduct the prisoner from the place. Mr. Mostyn arose to follow him. Constance stood up, drew the veil over her face, and slipped her arm within that of her husband.

Then in perfect silence, and under the battery of a hundred pairs of eyes, they passed out of the courtroom, down the street and into the prison.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when the hapless pair found themselves once more left alone in the cell. They sat down together on the side of the cot, her hand clasped in his, their eyes fixed in dreadful silence on the ground. He was the first to break the dumb spell.

"My Constance, what think you of all this?"

"Think! What do I think?—that it is an inscrutable mystery—perhaps a successful conspiracy—God knows!"

she ejaculated, convulsively closing her fingers upon the hand that held her own.

"And—no slightest shade of suspicion of my possible guilt disturbs your mind?"

She answered him only by a look.

"What, my own dearest? You trust me despite the overwhelming evidence?"

Still that eloquent look.

"Oh, Constance, my wife! You confide in me, notwithstanding the testimony of the blood-stained garments, the razor identified as mine, and the last words of the dying man, charging me with his murder?"

Yet that most eloquent look!—that look of undying, unwavering, ineffable trust!

"Now may the Lord of Heaven bless you, my wife—my wife—for your faith is my greatest stay in this most bitter hour!"

With a gesture of absorbing confidence, she raised the hand that held hers, and pressed it to her heart.

"But, sweet Constance, you are, of all this world, the only one who has faith in my innocence," he said, sorrowfully.

"If it be so, it is because I am the only one who knows you thoroughly, as why should I not? Am I not your second self?—the heart of your heart?"

"And soul of my soul! spirit of my spirit! life of my life! Yes, you are all these, my own—my own!" he said, gathering her to his bosom. Then, after a few moments, he added:

"Constance, you have great firmness?"

"When you demand it of me—yes, yes! Whatever you require of me I have, or, by God's grace, I will acquire! Test my firmness."

"Hear me, then, my Constance," he said, with deep solemnity. "I shall be convicted."

"Without Divine interposition," she reverently replied.

"And after conviction I shall be—executed!"

"Without 'Divine interposition'—yes," she repeated.

"Constance! my Constance! the days of miracles are past."

"But not of 'Divine interposition!'" she reiterated. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Oh, let us appeal to Him."

At ten o'clock the next morning the court met. The room was, if possible, more crowded, and with a more eager audience, than upon the preceding day.

A few minutes after ten the prisoner, accompanied by his wife, was brought in.

Mr. Mostyn was placed in the dock, and his wife seated herself immediately below it. As soon as they had sat down, Gerald raised his head, and Constance drew aside her veil, and those nearest to them then saw how pale and worn they had become since the previous day.

The business of the trial proceeded.

The counsel for the prisoner pointed out that it was only the suit of clothes that Alice Owen had identified, and that probably the deceased had made the same mistake as Miss Owen in supposing the murderer to be Gerald Mostyn.

This had very light weight, as was evidenced by the murmurs in court.

The various speeches were made, and the judge gave the charge in a manner that left no room for doubt as to his belief in the prisoner's guilt.

Without leaving their places, the jury consulted together for a few moments, and then the foreman arose and announced that their verdict was ready.

This sudden movement was totally unexpected. The stillness and coldness of death crept over the spectators. All present felt that they sat under the awful shadow of

the scaffold. For one dread moment all blood was congealed, every breath was suspended, and every heart stopped. The eyes of Constance sought those of her doomed husband; her fingers clasped his hand; her voice whispered:

"There remains God!"

The judge arose.

"Jurors, look upon the prisoner."

The eyes of the twelve rested upon the pale, firm face of Gerald Mostyn.

"Prisoner, look upon the jury."

Mr. Mostyn turned an unflinching gaze upon the men who held his fate in their hands.

"How say you, gentlemen of the jury—is Gerald Mostyn guilty of the felony laid to his charge, or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" responded the foreman.

"God liveth!"

The lips that breathed these words were pallid with mortal despair, and tremulous with woman's utmost woe! The tones were low, yet through the deep silence that followed the verdict, and filled the court, the words reverberated with awful power. They were an absolute relief to all over whom the fate of the prisoner hung like the blackest pall.

The next sound that broke upon the deathlike silence was the voice of the clerk:

"Gerald Mostyn, you have been duly tried and convicted of murder by a jury of your peers. Have you, therefore, anything to say why the judgment of death should not be pronounced upon you?"

The deep voice of the prisoner replied, addressing the judge:

"I have nothing to say, your honor, but what has already been better said by my counsel; nothing that would not uselessly prolong this painful scene, which I

entreat, for the sake of all concerned, may be concluded as speedily as possible; nothing, in short, that would not be a mere reiteration of the old, absolute truth of my guiltlessness, against overwhelming evidence of my guilt; nothing, in fine, but to express a hope that God may bring that truth to light."

As Gerald Mostyn spoke, so noble, calm and self-possessed was his bearing, so radiant with truth, faith and courage was his whole countenance, that there was not a man present but felt shaken in his convictions of his guilt, nor a woman but whose eyes were overflowing with tears. The sounds of sobs filled the room. The judge made a sign to the crier, who arose and pronounced the fearful words:

"Let there be silence in the court while sentence of death is pronounced upon the prisoner."

And a silence like death followed, for every sob was hushed, every breath suspended, every pulse stopped.

"Prisoner, arise and receive the sentence of the court," were the next terrible words that broke the stillness.

Mr. Mostyn arose and stood erect, with his arms folded across his chest, his stately head thrown back, his fine countenance undisturbed in proud serenity, his eyes fixed unflinchingly upon the face of the judge.

The venerable judge arose, his reverend face pale with pity for the prisoner and for the hapless lady who sat beside him; his deep voice vibrating with emotion as he pronounced upon the living the doom of the dying.

"Gerald Ross Mostyn: The crime of which you stand convicted, and for which you are about to suffer death, is one of the most heinous that the heart of man can conceive, or the hand of man perpetrate. The time, the place, the circumstances and the subject of this crime deepen, if anything can deepen, the atrocity of its character. It becomes my painful duty to admonish you that—in view of

the clear, impartial trial you have had, the overwhelming weight of the evidence against you, the utter weakness of your defense, and the enormity of the crime of which you stand convicted—for you there is no hope of pardon in this world; and to exhort you to seek, through deep repentance, the mercy of that Judge to whom the chief of sinners never appeals in vain, and before whom you are soon to appear. The sentence of the law is that you be taken from this place to the prison whence you came, and thence to the place of execution, and that there you be——"

Constance heard no more! There was a ringing sound as of a rushing river in her ears, a deep darkness like a thundercloud before her eyes; her senses reeled; her limbs failed; she had nearly swooned, when, by a mighty effort of the will, she caught herself, commanded back her powers, and recovered her self-control. She would not permit herself to give way then and there, to add to his distress! When the sound of many waters had ebbed from her ears, and the dark shadow had rolled from her eyes, and her reason had become steady, and sense, and sight, and hearing were restored, she saw the venerable judge, in tears, resume his seat, and heard the order given to remove the prisoner.

As one under the influence of a strange dream, too horrible to be real, she left her seat, and followed her husband from the court.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When thro' the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee thy sorrows to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy utmost distress.

—Sacred Songs.

It was dark when they reached the prison. The report of the verdict had preceded them. They were met by the jailer, who, with an even more than usual manner of grave kindness, showed them into the cell, and inquired whether he could in any way serve them.

"No, we want nothing, but to be left alone. We thank you, sir," replied Mr. Mostyn.

Left alone in the cell, the wretched pair sunk down, sitting upon the side of the cot, clasping each other's hands in perfect silence. Her impulse was to cast herself upon his bosom and give way in floods of tears to the overpowering sense of sorrow that swelled her heart almost to bursting; but, with a heroism nearly superhuman, she controlled her emotions, lest they should add to his distress, who felt mostly for her.

"All is over, love," he said, breaking the silence.

"Nay," she replied, woman's eternal fountain of hope springing for a moment in her bosom—"nay, all is not over! The Lord liveth and reigneth! Between this day and the day of——" she could not finish, so he added:

"Execution——"

"The truth may be brought to light. Let us think of, let us hope for, let us pray for that!"

Constance remained in the cell up to the latest permitted moment, and then, with the prayers and blessings of her husband, she took leave for the night. She was

accompanied to her lodgings by the kind-hearted jailer. She was met at the door by his compassionate wife, who would have detained her in the parlor, and forced upon her some refreshments, but that the hapless girl, by an imperative wave of the hand, warned off all interruption, and, with a swelling heart and reeling brain and falling muscles, hastened to her chamber.

There the almost superhuman firmness that had sustained her through the fearful scenes of the last two days at once and entirely abandoned her. Casting her arms above her head, and throwing herself down upon the floor, she lay, without sound or motion, prostrate in the most abject grief!

The next morning's paper announced the day fixed for the execution of Gerald Mostyn. He would willingly have kept the intelligence from his wife, but that Constance learned it from popular gossip. And after fervent prayer for strength, and long struggle, she once more gained the supremacy over sorrow, terror and despair, and, with a calm and comforting countenance, entered her husband's cell, sat down beside him on the cot, laid her gentle hand upon his shoulder, raised her true eyes to his face, and said:

"Dearest Gerald, I know all—all that you know—and can bear all that you bear. Let there be no more concealments, as there shall be no more partings between us. For, mark you, Mr. Mostyn, so long as I live and you live, I will remain with you. Ah, my husband, through all—all! What you can endure I can endure. And to the last moment of your life I will be by your side. My hand shall be the last to clasp your own, my eyes the last to receive your gaze!"

"Constance! Father in Heaven! Constance, have you strength to do this?"

"God helping me, I have and I will do it—and then die!" she mentally added.

Through all these days Gerald's friends were not idle. Renewed application had been made in his behalf for the clemency of the Crown, but made, alas! in vain. No pardon, no reprieve, not a day's respite from death was granted to the unhappy man.

Constance, whose faith in her husband's perfect guiltlessness amounted to knowledge, and who confidently believed that, if the opportunity were given her, she should be able to impress the same faith upon the mind of the minister, who would then feel constrained to grant the petition, besought with tears and prayers to be permitted to journey to the capital and seek an interview with the Home Secretary.

But it was now the dead of winter; the snow lay two feet deep upon the level, and drifted in avalanches along the mountain passes; the weather was tempestuous, the roads difficult and impracticable, coach and wagon traveling on many routes had stopped; and Mr. Mostyn would in nowise consent that his wife should undertake a journey that he knew would be a useless endangering of her health and life, or seek an interview which he felt in his soul would involve a fruitless sacrifice of her self-respect and dignity.

Meanwhile his life was dwindling to the shortest span.

It was a few days before that appointed for his execution, when an event occurred that revived the dying hope of Constance. Lord Starr arrived at Llyndell on his route north. Constance chanced to receive this intelligence on the very evening of the day of the minister's arrival. She was informed of it after she had left the prison, and was on her way up to her "chamber of desolation," by Mrs. Wardour, who had heard the news from a Llyndell man who had come into town.

Constance's oppressed heart rebounded in her bosom. Now she would have the opportunity of speaking with the secretary, her old friend and suitor. Surely he would listen to her arguments—surely he would be impressed with her faith, and grant her request. She hurried up into her chamber, closed the door, and threw herself on her knees to pray for a blessing upon her proposed undertaking, before she sought repose. Repose! for many weeks misery had murdered sleep; now hope kept her wide awake.

Early in the morning she sought her husband's cell, told him the news, and renewed her request. With impassioned earnestness she implored his permission to seek the secretary's presence.

"For, oh, Mr. Mostyn!" she cried, "even should the petition be again rejected, and the worst befall, it will be my only earthly comfort to remember that this means of saving you was not left untried."

The last argument was irresistible, and the passionately desired permission was given.

* * * * * * * *

"You did me the honor, madam, to command my attendance. Will you deign to inform me in what manner I can be so happy as to serve you?" said Lord Starr, when Constance was admitted to his study.

Constance made a profound obeisance and laid her petition upon the table before him.

The secretary raised it, recognized it as a petition that he had seen and rejected before, and, with a well-feigned look of sorrow, gently pushed it aside, saying, with grave courtesy:

"Your commands transcend my powers of compliance, madam."

"Oh! do not say so, sir. Well do I know that this Divine power of life and death is vested for us in your

influence with the Crown. Give us life! lift the miserable woman before you from the deepest depths of a sorrow you never dreamed of to the heights of a joy you can never imagine!" prayed Constance, with hands wrung together until their delicate blue veins started up and knotted like dark cords, and, with wild, dilated eyes, fixed in passionate supplication upon his face.

"You love this bridegroom of yours very much, madam," said the secretary, with a strange and ominous change in his voice.

"Love him!" responded Constance, in a tone deep, low and vibrating with intense emotion—"Love him! Oh, sir! at a less solemn crisis your question might call a blush to my cheek; but not now—not when life or death may hang upon the next words you utter! Yes, I love him!—so much that if he should suffer the death to which he is condemned, I also, who have not been tried or convicted, must share his unmerited fate—for I could not survive him!"

"What, madam, would you be a suicide?" exclaimed the secretary, in a voice of horror.

"No, no; nor would it be necessary. I should not destroy myself, but die!"

"Madam—all this while you are standing. I pray you, resume your seat."

"No, no, sir! This attitude, or one still more humble, is the proper posture for a supplicant in the presence of the power who holds her life in his hands!"

"Why harp you on this subject, lady? I hold no power over your precious life."

"Over my husband's, then; and through his, over mine."

"You mistake, madam. My power is not so unlimited as you imagine," he said. Taking up the petition, glancing over it, and then laying it down, he continued: "The

pardoning prerogative, as vested in the Crown, is certainly a discretionary power; but it is, also, a holy trust, and should be exercised only on rare occasions, well understood, and on certain conditions, under no one of which Mr. Mostyn's case comes. He has had a fair trial; he has been convicted under the most crushing weight of both circumstantial evidence and positive testimony, which has left no shadow of a doubt as to his guilt in the minds of any, except, perhaps, his too confiding bride, and which has left no possible loophole for his escape from death. Pardon me, madam, that I speak thus plainly upon a most painful subject. I do so only to justify myself before you."

While he spoke, Constance stood with her form half bent toward him, her white hands wrung painfully together, her bloodless lips compressed, and her wild, impassioned eyes strained forth in an agony of entreaty.

"Oh, sir," she began, "there is no need to justify yourself to me. And neither do I petition for a pardon, since no crime has been committed. But for a respite from death I implore you on my knees!" she continued, sinking at his feet, and bowing her head almost to the dust before him.

"Madam, arise. The respite for which you pray falls under the same rule as the pardon for which you scorn to petition. I could as consistently advise the one as the other. And if I could, bethink you, dear lady, of what little use such respite would be? It would, indeed, only serve to prolong the agony better got over at once. Dear lady, arise. It wounds me cruelly to see you thus," he said, taking her hand, and gently essaying to lift her to her feet.

"No, no! No, no! Here, on my knees—until you grant my prayer! What use would the respite be? you ask. Every use! Sir, he is guiltless! he is guiltless!

God knoweth that he is; and in the additional length of days that might be accorded, God would discover the truth and bring to light his stainless integrity. Oh, sir! procure for him that one remaining chance of life! Think what it is to die for a crime he never committed! To be cut off in the bloom of youth, and glow of love, and glory of fame! To be forced violently from this dear life and warm sunshine, and bright world, full of sweet affections, and aspiring hopes, and to be crowded down into the darksome grave! to him who has just reached the acme of all his toils, and hopes, and aspirations—to be suddenly struck down—down—down to this deep Gehenna of destruction! Oh, sir, do you realize this? Lord Starr, hear me! pity me! save me! and I will bless your mercy, and pray for your happiness forever!" she cried, convulsively, clasping both his hands in both of hers, and straining her wild and terrified eyes up to his face, in the deep anguish of supplication.

"Constance Wynne," he replied, in a solemn tone, "there was a time, not long ago, when, at your feet, I poured forth my soul in prayer for that mercy which you now implore of me for another! Only, Constance, it was not for the boon of life I prayed, but for that blessing which would have made life passing sweet to me!"

Constance! The current of her blood turned back on hearing these words. All that she had ever heard of the fierce, cruel and relentless spirit that lurked behind his fascinating smile and suave, stately courtesy rushed upon her memory, congealing her heart. She raised her eyes in consternation to his face, and answered, with grave sweetness:

"Remember those things no longer, sir, or remember them only in mercy; and if ever you have esteemed poor Constance Wynne, be magnanimous to Constance Mostyn."

"I will endeavor to be just, at least. Constance, a respite would do Mr. Mostyn no good; it would but indefinitely prolong his imprisonment with the faint 'hope deferred that maketh the heart sick.'" He paused and gazed down upon his supplicant, who remained with her hands clasped, and her eyes fixed upon him with the same expression of wild entreaty.

"Constance," he said, "there is one condition upon which I will interfere to save Gerald Mostyn's life, so that he shall go forth from the prison a free man."

The blood rushed in torrents to her brow, and, retreating, left her even paler than before. Her eyes were more wildly dilated; she looked and felt like one suddenly stricken with madness.

"What is it you say?" she inquired, in a voice sunken with intense anxiety and perplexity. "Oh, did I hear aright? You will save his life?"

"His life will I save upon a certain condition."

Constance sprang to her feet, as an overwhelming tide of joy rushed over her.

"His life! his life! A respite I know you could procure; but his life! his life! Oh, God! my God! I thank Thee, for this is more than I could have hoped for, or would have dared to pray for. I am not insane or dreaming, am I, sir?" she asked, turning a distressed, appealing gaze upon the Home Secretary.

"No, madam. You have heard aright. I will save Mr. Mostyn's life upon certain conditions with which you can comply."

"Command me, then. What would I not do or suffer to save my husband! My whole fortune, my life, if necessary, would I give to purchase his salvation!" exclaimed Constance, with eager earnestness.

"Be seated, dear lady, while I speak of the terms upon which I will do as I have promised," said the secretary,

as, with grave courtesy, he handed his companion to a chair, and drew his own to her side.

"And now—the conditions," said Constance.

Lord Starr arose, and, with his graceful, gliding step, passed to the door, opened it, looked out, and apparently satisfied that the coast was clear, reclosed it, and returned, and resumed his seat opposite Constance.

He drew his chair forward, so that when he rested his elbow on the table, and leaned his head upon his hand, his face was somewhat too familiarly close to that of the lady.

"This is understood to be a confidential interview, madam?"

"Since you desire—yes, my lord," said Constance, with dignity; "only inform me in what manner you can save my husband."

"Nay, madam, that is only to be imparted upon conditions. I have also to ask of you a promise, that all which passes between us in this interview shall, in any event, be kept private."

Constance paused a moment to reflect, and then answered directly, but still with dignity:

"Your lordship has my promise."

He drew his chair closer, and dropped his voice to a whisper in addressing her.

"Constance Wynne, I love you," began the minister, in a hesitating voice.

But Constance sprang to her feet, the indignant blood in torrents crimsoning her face, neck and bosom, fire flashing from her eyes, anger convulsing her frame. She could not speak, but stood for an instant pressing both hands hard upon her heart to keep down its rising passion. Then, growing very pale, she suddenly turned and walked toward the door.

Lord Starr started up to delay her.

"Madam—Constance, do not leave me thus! Hear me explain."

But as if scorning to hold an instant of further conversation with one so base, the lady passed through the room, leaving Lord Starr standing there, the picture of discomfiture.

CHAPTER XIX.

The soul that to Jesus has fled for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to its foes:
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I will never, no never, no never forsake.—SACRED SONGS.

The last night of Gerald Mostyn's allotted life!

It was now six o'clock, the usual hour at which Constance was accustomed to take leave of him for the night.

The hapless couple sat together on the side of the bed. Before them stood the little stand, upon which was a lighted lamp and an open Bible, a chapter of which they had just finished reading. Each had stifled the mighty anguish of the breast, and had struggled to comfort and sustain the other. They were now silent; and the awful shadow of death seemed lowering over the heads of both.

Through imprisonment, sorrow and anxiety Mr. Mostyn had become emaciated in feature and cadaverous in complexion; but in the expression of his countenance, in his words and manners he still evinced unshaken firmness.

Grief, care and vigilance had so blanched and sharpened the face of Constance that her large gray eyes and her broad expanse of brow, crowned with its "aureole of ebon locks," seemed preternaturally developed. Yet she, too, though secretly dying of sorrow, exhibited a matchless patience and serenity.

But it was now, as I said, six o'clock, the usual hour of closing. Good Mr. Wardour tapped at the cell door, and, upon the response of Mr. Mostyn bidding him to come in, he unlocked the door and entered.

"You are about to shut up for the night?" inquired the prisoner.

"Yes," replied the warden, in a broken voice, for he sympathized deeply and painfully with the hapless pair.

"Constance, dearest Constance, bid me good-night and leave me now," said Mr. Mostyn, gently drawing his bride to his bosom for a parting embrace.

"I will never leave thee more," responded the lady, in a low, deep voice.

"But, sweet wife, reflect!"

"I have reflected. And for the few short hours we have to live, I will remain by thy side."

"My own dearest! take some pity on yourself! Do not so fearfully try your strength," he entreated, gazing on her tortured but resolute countenance.

"I have strength to suffer all, save separation from thee in thy time of trial; strength to do all save desert thee in thy hour of bitterest need; strength to bear all that may be required of me!" she replied. And then, turning to the jailer, she added:

"Mr. Wardour, I shall not leave my husband's cell to-night."

The jailer bowed in silence. He was sure that he was not doing right in permitting this infringement of custom; but he could not find it in his heart to refuse this last comfort to the unhappy lady.

Left alone with Constance in his cell, Gerald trimmed his lamp and resumed the reading of the Scriptures, after which they knelt and prayed together.

These devotions occupied the whole evening until ten o'clock. Then, calmed, strengthened and refreshed, they prepared for rest. Neither expected to sleep; but each sought repose only in the hope of bringing it to the other.

The eyes of Constance never closed in sleep for one single instant, but lest her wakefulness should keep him from slumber, she remained perfectly still.

Gerald, believing her to be asleep, thanked God for

the blessing, and fearing to stir lest he should awaken her, gave himself up to such meditations as he deemed appropriate to his condition. In the midst of these, sleep, like a *benedicite*, fell softly on his soul. Constance knew by his regular breathing that this was so. And she folded her hands together and prayed for him—and for herself so far as that she might be permitted to die when he should die. While thus praying, the angel of sleep pressed down her eyelids also, and she, too, slept.

Constance sleeps and dreams a sweet dream of love and glory.

In her dream she is a happy bride, by her husband's side. Their earthly ambition is crowned with the highest success. He moves, and fame follows his footsteps, and she basks in his reflected light. They stand within a vast and crowded hall; he speaks, and admiring multitudes hang upon his inspired and inspiring words. The scene changes: He stands within a magnificent hall, sumptuous with velvet hangings, splendid with reflected light, crowded with an innumerable company. He is greeted with shouts of applause by the vast assembly that fills to suffocation the great hall; by the crowds that choke up the galleries, stairs, lobbies and anterooms leading to it; thunders of applause rend the very sky! In the intensity of her delight and triumph for him, Constance awakes——

The narrow walls of the prison cell inclose her! There, on the poor cot, lies the worshiped of her heart, the hero of her glorious dream, prostrate, emaciated, bloodless—and soon, oh, Heaven of heavens, to die!

The shouts she had heard in her dream were the voices of a rude crowd in the street below the prison, who were cursing, swearing and elbowing each other, as they hurried tumultuously onward to secure good standing places on Gallows Hill, outside the town, where the

execution was to take place. Constance saw and heard them as she turned and looked through the grated window that was close beside her pillow and that overlooked the street below; and, totally bereft of courage by her bright, delusive dream and its terrible contrast, she cowered down, groaning, shuddering and writhing in extremity of anguish.

"My Constance! my beloved one! take courage!"

It was his voice that spoke! his voice! It recalled her to a sense of duty! With one of those mighty efforts in which years of vitality are in a moment consumed, she controlled her agony, composed herself, and arose.

"It was the dream that did it; but fear nothing for me, dearest; I am myself, and shall not fail again!" she said, sweetly, yielding her lips to his kiss as serenely as if she had only arisen to superintend their house and sit at the head of their table.

They soon knelt and offered up their morning orisons. It was well; they received new strength from this, for as they arose beside the cot, the little grated window was before them, and through its bars they saw the eastern horizon all blazing with the glorious light of the rising sun, and the snow-clad hills all crimsoned with the ruddy reflection; but oh, God of mercies! there, on the highest hill—there, strongly marked against the white background of the snow and the crimson glow of the sky—reared the ghastly gallows! A motley crowd surrounded the scaffold; other crowds in different groups, by different paths, were climbing the hill.

With a terrible shudder, Constance turned away her head and covered her eyes.

Calmly Gerald Mostyn drew the little curtain across the grating, to shut from her eyes the view.

The turnkey soon tapped at the cell door, entered and supplied them with the simple necessaries for their prison

toilet. Then the warden came with the slight breakfast, which, with the exception of the coffee, was sent untasted away.

The brief winter morning was already far spent; the execution was appointed to take place between the hours of nine and twelve. It was now half-past nine. As the humble breakfast service was removed, Mr. Osborne entered the cell. In speechless sorrow he pressed the hands of Gerald and Constance. And when he had recovered his composure, he entered into conversation with them, and finding both calm and firm, he proposed prayer. Ah, prayer! greatest comfort and support in the heaviest afflictions! Often had they resorted to the fountain of strength and consolation, and never had they come unblessed away. Again, led by the minister of God, they prayed, and again they were blessed.

Ten o'clock! As they arose from their kneeling posture there was a sound of a carriage drawn up before the prison gate. Mr. Osborne shivered, for well he knew the import of that slight noise. Next there was heard the coming of several feet along the lobby, and a passing at the cell door, followed almost instantly by the opening of the door, and the entrance of the sheriff alone.

All knew his errand. He was clothed in his official suit, and the solemnity of his countenance did not belie his sombre costume. He looked much disturbed on seeing the lady still in the cell; but recovered himself, bowed, and inquired of Mr. Mostyn whether he had slept well, and how he found himself this morning.

Mr. Mostyn answered that he had rested through the night, and was prepared this morning to meet his fate.

At a signal of the clergyman all knelt, and for the last time offered up a short and fervent prayer. As soon as they arose, Constance tied on her little bonnet, Gerald drew her arm within his own, and, preceded by the

sheriff and the clergyman, and followed by the warden and turnkey, they left the cell and went below, where, before the prison, the fatal carriage waited.

A half hour's rapid drive over the plains outside the town brought them to the foot of the hill upon which the scaffold had been erected. Here, as they slowly climbed the ascent, the constable had to ride before to keep off the rabble, who, anxious to get a sight at the prisoner, thronged the road. As they neared the top of the hill they found the crowd denser.

It was with difficulty, and in the face of brutal resistance, obscene abuse and blasphemous oaths, that the constable forced a way for the carriage to pass to the foot of the scaffold. Here they entered a hollow square, formed by a company of the county militia, whose bayonets glittered in the morning sun around the scaffold.

The carriage drew up near the foot of the scaffold. The sheriff got out and handed out his prisoner, and arm in arm they stood waiting.

The minister then got out and assisted Constance to alight, and drawing her arm in his, joined the sheriff and the prisoner.

They all waited only for Gerald Mostyn to take leave of his wife. She came to his side with a face blanched whiter than his own. Her hand was clasped in his, and her eyes lifted in holy love and faith to his face. Yet no one could look upon her marble brow and burning eyes, as they were raised to his, and not feel that her life hung upon his life, and that the snapping of his thread of existence would also sever her own!

"Come, my own Constance," he said, "show yourself a Christian woman in this trial. Here—give me both your hands! look into my eyes!"

She gave him both her hands, and gazed with deathless love into his eyes.

"This is not the last clasp! this is not the last glance! We shall meet again in a very few minutes! Wait for me, love, in the heavens above, for I shall not be an hour behind you," she said.

"Dearest, you give me strength to die! God bless you," he replied, pressing a parting kiss upon her lips, and beckoning to Mr. Osborne to come and receive her from his arms.

Constance returned her husband's last kiss and benediction, and yielded herself to the charge of the minister, who, placing one arm around her waist to support her falling form, put her in the carriage.

The sheriff drew the prisoner's arm within his own, and led him up the steps to the scaffold.

When Gerald Mostyn appeared upon the platform, high above the heads and in full view of the vast concourse of people assembled around the scaffold, a terrible shout greeted him. But when the next moment Mr. Osborne, the clergyman, stepped upon the platform, and stood beside the condemned, a dead silence of awe fell upon the turbulent human sea, and there was a great calm! Two deputies to attend the sheriff followed the pastor. In the centre, upon the fatal trap, stood Gerald Mostyn, whose pale face formed a ghastly contrast to the simple black dress he wore; on his right stood the minister of God, with an open prayer book in his hand. Behind them stood the sheriff's officers.

So absorbed were they in the momentous scene in which they were the actors, that they were totally unconscious of the tumult that was beginning to agitate the vast multitude around the scaffold.

The minister opened the book, and amid a deathlike silence, commenced reading the solemn service for the dead. The ritual occupied some fifteen minutes, and when it was over, and the minister's voice had ceased,

you might have heard a pin fall, so perfect was the stillness. The supreme moment—the moment of the execution—had arrived. At a signal from the sheriff, the clergyman pressed the hand of the prisoner, and withdrew from his side. One bailiff produced the cap—the other the cord! The sheriff advanced his foot near the spring.

And Gerald Mostyn was standing upon the fatal drop! At a signal from the sheriff his two associates advanced to perform their terrible office. But before the first could slip the cap over the face of the condemned, the tumult that had been rising for the last two minutes now broke into a deafening shout, and——

"Hold! hold! A respite! a respite!" was thundered to the sky. The vast sea of heads swayed violently to and fro, like the waves of the ocean lashed by a storm or the multitudinous leaves of the forest driven by the wind.

"A reprieve! a reprieve!" again arose in thunder from the ground.

And as the crowd swayed and parted right and left, a horseman, bearing a white flag, with his steed covered with foam, and his dress stained with travel, galloped furiously onward, and threw himself from his saddle at the foot of the scaffold. The steed tottered and fell from exhaustion. But the rider, giving no thought to this, sprang up the ladder, bounded upon the platform, and thrust a sealed paper into the hands of the sheriff. That officer tore open the packet, ran his eyes hurriedly over its contents, and then, turning to the amazed prisoner, held out his hand, and said:

"Mr. Mostyn, allow me to congratulate you! The Home Secretary has relented. His lordship has procured you a respite."

"My God, I thank thee!" were Gerald Mostyn's first

words. His next thought was of his wife. "Constance! oh, Constance!" he cried, stretching his arms toward the carriage where she lay insensible in the arms of the minister.

But Constance had fainted. She had been prepared for death, but not for life; and the sudden joy of the respite had overwhelmed her, and she lay in a deep swoon.

But joy never kills. Constance was soon revived, and took her seat beside her husband on their way back to town.

CHAPTER XX.

Oh, father, bear with me; my heart
  Is sick and deathlike, and my brain
  Seems girdled with a fiery chain,
Whose scorching links will never part,
  And never cool again.
Bear with me while I speak; but turn
  Away that gentle eye the while;
The fires of guilt more fiercely burn
  Beneath its holy smile.—WHITTIER.

We must go back for a little to relate the circumstances that led to the change in his lordship's intentions, and to the consequent act of clemency which had given Gerald Mostyn again to life.

On the Saturday evening preceding, old priest Maraudey occupied the confessional of St. Andrew's, at Crucis. The shades of evening were gathering fast; the dim church was faintly lighted by the two wax tapers that burned before the great altar, and fell here and there upon the carved image of angel, saint, or martyr that filled the niches near; the old priest, hopeless of another penitent that night, was about to rise and leave the church, when the sound of a hasty and faltering footstep near caused him to pause and resume his seat.

And the next moment the curtain was put aside, and a man entered, and dropped rather than kneeled at the feet of the confessor. At first he did not speak, but the sound of his laboring lungs and palpitating heart was audible through the stillness of the church. He panted like a hunted beast at bay or a fugitive fallen exhausted in a fight for life. His face was blanched to a chalky whiteness, and sharpened till each feature gleamed out

with piercing distinctness; his brows were knit, writhen together; the corners of his mouth drawn down, and his white lips apart and stiff as by extreme agony; great drops of sweat stood upon his corrugated brow; his hands were wrung together, until the finger joints shone out like horns; his whole form shuddered, cowered, groveled at the feet of the priest.

"Have mercy on me, father, for I have awfully sinned," he gasped, in an almost unintelligible voice.

"Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow! Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!" said the priest, gently.

"And mine," broke forth the wretched man, in an agony of remorse, "mine are red like crimson, for my hand is crimsoned—is crimsoned with the crime for which another must suffer in the morning!"

"Oh, my son! my unhappy son! what is that which you tell me?" exclaimed the priest, in horror.

"I tell you that which God and Satan and I and you now know to be true! My hand, and my hand only, is red with the blood of him for whose murder Gerald Mostyn must innocently suffer to-morrow!"

"My son! my son, you are mad!"

"Would to Heaven I were!"

There fell a sudden silence of awe between them, which was broken at last by the troubled voice of the priest.

"My son, can it be that you are sane, and that you speak the truth?"

"I speak the truth! God knoweth whether I am sane, or if so, how long I may continue sane. I did the deed!"

"Oh, my son! my son! what tempted you to this crime?"

"Avarice tempted me! Avarice crazed me! The old man was aged and miserly! His life and his hoarded gold were alike useless to all! I slew him for his gold!

Remorse soon seized upon my soul, but I soothed the gnawing pain by repeating to myself that the victim was old and wicked, and his taking off hurt no one—not even himself. But now a young man full of life, vigor, and hope, blessed with love and wealth, and well-earned fame, is dishonored, and about to die for my deed! Thus crime grows out of crime, and the weight of sin is pressing my soul down to perdition! Oh, father! for the love of Christ, tell me what shall I do!"

The priest did not immediately answer, but bowed his head, and reflected for a few moments, then looking up, he inquired, solemnly:

"Do you demand my counsel in full sincerity of purpose to follow it!"

"I do."

"My son, that which I counsel you to do is the only one right thing to do. It is painful, grievous, intolerable, I know, but it is the sole course left to you. My son, you should go instantly to the town, confess your sin, clear the innocent, and give yourself up to the authorities. It is a terrible trial, I know, but it is the only restitution you can make, and God will give you strength to make it."

Nothing but deep groans from the wretched man answered this. The priest prayed in silence for his penitent.

"Father!" at length cried the man, "I repent in sorrow and bitterness of spirit! Father, will you not absolve me of my sin?"

"Son, I can absolve you only on the conditions I have named."

"And they, father, are——"

"That you shall go and deliver yourself up, and save the innocent from unmerited punishment."

"Oh, I cannot, father! I cannot! I dare not meet the consequences!"

"Then I dare not give you absolution! Reflect, my son, that if, before to-morrow, you have not denounced yourself to the authorities, Gerald Mostyn will have perished on the scaffold for your crime, and you will have taken upon your own soul the burthen of an unsupportable sin."

"Father, you cannot give me absolution except I give myself up?"

"No."

"And this is your ultimatum, father?"

"This is my ultimatum."

"God help me, then!" cried the penitent, starting to his feet, and rushing from the confessional.

In a moment he was back again, asking, hurriedly:

"Father, you recognized me?"

"I recognized you, my son," replied the priest.

"And you know who I am?"

"I well know who you are."

"Father!" exclaimed the man, in alarm, "you have refused me absolution, unless I make a public acknowledgment of my crime, and give myself up to die in the stead of the innocent condemned man; how know I but that you may go still further, and denounce me to the authorities?"

"Your story, my son, was confided to me under the seal of confession—the sacred seal that may never be broken?"

"And my secret is safe with you?"

"As safe, alas! as with the dead!"

"Even though Gerald Mostyn should innocently perish to-morrow, for the lack of the secret being divulged?"

"Alas, yes! Even to save an innocent man from dying

the death of the guilty, I may not break a solemn oath! But, my son, I charge you, as you value your soul's immortal weal, yourself to give that secret to the winds!"

"It is enough, father! I go!"

"To divulge your crime and clear the innocent, I hope, my son!"

"No, but to wrestle with remorse, despair, anguish!" cried the miserable man, starting up and hurrying from the scene.

That night Lord Starr was seated at the supper table, at Llyndell, in company with Colonel North and the ladies of the family. To say that the "forthcoming event" did not cast its "shadow before" and over them would not be true. Yet each and all endeavored to rally their spirits, ignore the approaching tragedy, and keep up the thread of an animated conversation. In the midst of this scene the door opened, and a servant entered, bearing a card, which, with a bow, he presented to Lord Starr. The pasteboard bore the name of—

"Peter Maraudey," and the words:

"Entreats an immediate interview with his excellency, on a matter of life and death."

"Madam, and young ladies, will you have the goodness to excuse me?" suavely inquired Lord Starr, as he arose.

"Assuredly, sir," was the affable reply.

And with a bow the Home Secretary left the table and the dining-room, and passed into the parlor, where Father Maraudey awaited him.

The stout priest arose and bowed, but the Home Secretary clasped his hand in a friendly shake, motioned him to resume his seat, took a chair beside him, and inquired in what manner he could be so happy as to serve Mr. Maraudey.

"I come, your lordship, upon a matter of life and death," said the priest, solemnly.

"So your note informed me. May I inquire what that matter of life and death may be?"

"Sir, it concerns Mr. Gerald Mostyn, now under sentence of death in the county jail, and ordered for execution."

The Home Secretary suddenly grew very grave, and remained silent, with his chin dropped upon his breast, and his right hand buried in his bosom, in an attitude of deep thought.

"Mr. Mostyn, sir, is really innocent of the crime for which he has been condemned."

"Assuredly," sneered the Home Secretary, "he is innocent by the verdict of his friends, but, unfortunately by that of the jury he is guilty."

"Sir, I offer you no mere opinions! I do not only believe, but know Gerald Mostyn to be guiltless of the murder of Hugh Horne!" said the priest, with a profound earnestness of manner, look, and tone, that carried strong conviction with it.

The minister stared.

"You know it?"

"I know it," responded the priest, with deep solemnity.

The minister half rose from his chair, and gazed with astonishment upon the speaker.

"How do you know this, may I inquire?" he then asked.

"By knowing the real murderer!"

"What! Take care, Mr. Maraudey! Be cautious, I pray you, how you implicate another in the crime that has been abundantly proved upon Gerald Mostyn. What evidence, I ask you, sir, can you give to support your statement?"

"I have the best possible evidence, the testimony of the conscience-stricken man who really did the murder!"

"Then, sir, in heaven's name, who is the murderer?"

"Lord Starr, I am not at liberty to tell you!"

"How, sir! Not at liberty to divulge the name of a criminal?"

"No, my lord."

"And why, I beseech you!"

"Because, sir, the secret was confided to me by the conscience-stricken criminal, under the sacred seal of confession—a seal that my priestly oath forbids me under any circumstances, or in any emergency, to violate," said the father, solemnly.

"What, not even to bring a guilty man to justice, nor yet to save the innocent from unmerited punishment?"

"Not even for that, my lord; not even to save my own life from death could I break my clerical oath and violate the sacred seal of confession."

"Am I to understand, sir, that while admitting that you know the real murderer of Hugh Horne, you refuse to divulge his identity?"

"I do, sir."

"Then it becomes my duty to arrest you, reverend sir," said the minister, rising and touching the bell.

A servant entered to answer the summons.

"Go and request your master to come hither," said the minister.

The man bowed and withdrew for a few minutes, at the end of which he returned, and ushered into the parlor Colonel North.

The old soldier bowed to and shook hands with the priest, and then turned upon the Home Secretary a look of inquiry, as if to say:

"Well, what am I to do for you?"

Answering that look, Lord Starr turned, and gravely addressing his host, said:

"You are one of the justices of the peace for this county, I believe, sir?"

"I have that honor," replied the colonel, much wondering at the question.

"Then I here charge Peter Maraudey, Catholic priest, of St. Andrew's, as an accessory after the fact to the murder of Hugh Horne, and also as being guilty of compounding a felony, in willfully concealing the name of a principal in the crime. And I request, Mr. Justice, that he be arrested and examined upon this charge," said Lord Starr, resuming his seat, while the astounded Colonel North strove to collect his scattered faculties. As soon as he found the use of his tongue, he began to express his astonishment, and to exclaim:

"Arrest good Father Maraudey! and as an accessory to—— Well, what next, I wonder? A touch of an earthquake, I hope, to give us a good shaking up at once, and be done with it."

"If, sir, you will swear me as a witness, I prefer to make a statement on oath," said the minister.

Colonel North bowed, took his seat at the table, formed his little impromptu court, administered the oath, and took the statement of Lord Starr. Then he examined Mr. Maraudey, who frankly told him all that had been related to the minister; but refused to give any more particular information.

"But you would not for this cause send the good father to prison?" expostulated Colonel North.

The minister bowed.

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I do not mind——" began the priest.

"Oh, if you 'do not mind,' that is another affair," said Colonel North, very dryly. Whereupon an officer was summoned, a warrant made out, and Mr. Maraudey committed to the county jail.

As he was leaving the house he turned and said:

"Your lordship will at least procure a respite to the prisoner under sentence of death!"

"I cannot answer or satisfy you upon that point," replied Lord Starr, with a sardonic smile, as he paid back to the priest his own words.

Mr. Maraudey bowed, and followed the officer who had him in charge.

But Lord Starr, with all his faults of character, was not the man to hang another whom he had any reason to believe guiltless.

He set out for London that very night, and as soon as the necessary forms could be passed, he sent down the respite to Llyndell, where it arrived late on the night preceding the day fixed for the execution of Gerald Mostyn.

"It is now ten o'clock. Where can I get a messenger who can cross the mountains and ride to Gwyn to be in time to save that man?" inquired Colonel North, in dismay.

"Dr. Heath has just arrived on his fast horse, Hassan. He would kill his horse, I know, to save the fellow," replied a gentleman present.

And accordingly Dr. Heath was summoned, and gladly undertook the delivery of the respite, which he accordingly and punctually accomplished.

CHAPTER XXI.

And over all these hung a solemn gloom,
The step stole fearful thro' each shadowy room.
Dark, sumptuous, solemn as some eastern pile,
Where mutes keep watch—a home without a smile.
Noiseless, as silence reigned there like a law
Till the cold luxury saddened into awe.—BULWER.

Leaving stout Mr. Maraudey in the clutches of the law, and leaving the unfortunate Gerald Mostyn and his faithful wife in the prison cell to which he had been remanded, it is now necessary to the elucidation of our story that we should visit another habitation, which, though more cheerful in its superficial aspect, was scarcely less gloomy in its interior spirit.

Radnor House was a beautiful building of white stone, with porches running along the whole front from basement to roof. Behind it arose a background of wooded mountains. Before it fell the valley, rolling in undulating hills down to the banks of the rapid river. Externally the whole scene was radiant with life and beauty.

Pass the threshold of the house, and all was changed.

Within a luxurious chamber of that sumptuous dwelling, Mrs. Horne, the mistress of the mansion, lay slowly expiring. Thus she had lain many days, and thus she might lay many days longer, in a state that was neither life nor death.

From the night of the murder of old Hugh Horne she had slowly failed. But so much of fitful gloom and eccentricity characterized her malady that her friends did not scruple to ascribe her strange moods to partial insanity.

While still living beneath the same roof with her hus-

band, she entirely separated herself from him. Though, as long as she was able to do so, she had scrupulously fulfilled her duties as the mistress of his household, yet she had avoided his society and conversation.

From the time of the arrest of Gerald Mostyn for the murder of Hugh Horne, her malady had greatly increased. She had watched the trial with intense and fearful interest. When, at length, she had heard of his conviction and sentence, she had sunk back fainting upon the bed, from which she was destined never more to rise.

And from this time her husband durst not even cross the threshold of her chamber, for at the sight of his face she invariably fell into violent convulsions, that threatened speedily to exterminate her life. This seemed the more extraordinary, as Dr. Horne had always enjoyed the reputation of being a constant and devoted husband, and Mrs. Horne had also the character of a fond and faithful wife. And no one could solve the mystery of this new and strange antagonism, or ascribe its existence to any other cause than monomania on the part of Mrs. Horne.

Her husband was constrained to avoid her apartment, where nothing but distress greeted his appearance. Her friends felt compelled to abandon a house so full of gloom and terror, where all evil influences seemed to congregate.

Only Alice Owen, the gentle young nurse, remained faithful to the suffering lady.

Since Dr. Horne had been obliged to absent himself from her sight, his place as her physician had been filled by Francis Heath, whose wise and gentle ministrations, conjoined to those of Alice Owen, would have soothed and restored the unhappy lady, could any human power have saved her.

But if the young physician, with his utmost skill and attention, did not succeed in doing more than alleviating

his patient's sufferings, he did not fail to observe and admire the disinterested devotion of the sweet young girl who, regardless of fatigue, day and night devoted herself, with saintlike patience, to the service of the sufferer. Day by day the beauty of her soul, no less than the loveliness of her face and form, more and more deeply impressed his imagination and his heart. But he felt that the house of mourning was for every reason an improper place for his wooing, and thus it was that the love which had taken so deep root in his heart remained unspoken, though not unrevealed; for it found a certain and intelligible expression in the softer glances of his eyes, and the deeper tones of his voice, and the gentler deference in his manner in addressing her.

And Alice knew that she was beloved, and felt that she also loved; and yet so well she guarded her own eyes, and tones and manner, that no sign of this reciprocity of feeling escaped her. And whether her conduct was governed by maiden modesty, or morbid self-respect, is not known; but it is certain that Dr. Heath was left in doubt as to the feelings of his ladylove.

Francis Heath had known Alice Owen long enough, and studied her character and disposition closely enough, to feel sure that she was all his heart could desire, or his reason approve, in a wife, and he felt that he esteemed and loved her beyond all living women; yet, having resolved to delay his wooing to some more appropriate time and place, he confined himself to such deferential attentions as a gentleman might anywhere pay a lady.

But our strong resolutions often give way to impulse or yield to circumstances.

One morning the young physician, standing by the bedside of his patient, heard her murmur to herself:

"What will become of Alice when I am gone?"

"Aye, what indeed!" thought the doctor—"for after

the death of her patroness, the world will not permit her to remain beneath the roof of a young widower, without any lady at the head of the house! What, then, will become of the orphan girl? Who will receive her? Whither can she go? Ah! this question pressing upon my heart, changes my whole duty. I must have an explanation with her at once, so that when she withdraws from this roof, she will go forth, as my wife, to a home of her own."

With these generous thoughts and purposes occupying his mind and heart, he left the chamber of his patient, and went down into the lower hall.

Providence seemed to favor his wishes. Contrary to her usual practice, Alice Owen had left the sickroom, and was now standing at the parlor door, seemingly awaiting the doctor, for as he appeared she beckoned him into the parlor, and begged him to satisfy her as to the present condition and future prospects of his patient.

Francis Heath replied with simple and straightforward candor, giving but little hope of her restoration to health. On receiving his answer, Alice bowed gently, and was about to withdraw from the room, when the lover respectfully intercepted her by saying:

"Miss Owen, will you give me the favor of a very few moments' conversation with you?"

Alice gravely bowed assent, and seated herself in the chair that he had placed for her accommodation.

Francis Heath then placed himself beside and a little behind her, so that he need not embarrass her by too direct a front view, and resting his hand on the back of her chair, he stooped, and after a little embarrassment and hesitation, began:

"Alice, you and I have known each other for nearly three years. What I think of you need not be spoken, as it is about to be proved; and I hope that you, Alice, re-

gard me as an honest and thriving man, who is both willing and able to take care of the woman who may bless him with her hand."

The doctor paused.

Alice neither looked up nor spoke, but remained with her chin dropped upon her breast, and her hands crossed upon her lap.

"The meaning of all this is, Alice, that I love you. Will you be my wife?" whispered Francis, stooping closer to her ear.

Still Alice neither spoke nor moved, except to close her eyes to stop the tears which else would have rolled down her cheeks; but which now hung, glistening drops of dew, on the dark fringes of her eyelashes.

"Dear Alice, you do not answer me. Well, love, I will not distress you. Only let me take your hand, and I will understand that I am to be blessed with your acceptance of my love." And suiting the action to the word, he clasped her fingers, and would have raised them to his lips, but she gently withdrew her hand, and in a voice so low that he had to stoop quite low to hear her, she answered:

"Dr. Heath, I thank you sincerely for the honor you have done me; but I beg that you will withdraw your proposal and forget that it ever was made."

Deeply distressed by this rejection, yet impressed by the exquisite delicacy with which it was worded, Dr. Heath remained for a few minutes silently regarding her. Then in faltering tones he asked:

"Alice, will you permit me to inquire why you have given me this answer?"

"Yes. 'Pity,' they say, 'is kin to love.' You have seen me here, and compassionated my orphaned condition, and you call that love which is truly mercy," was the gentle reply.

"Alice, listen to me. The Lord knoweth that my love never sprang from so disparaging a sentiment as pity. It was born of admiration rather. Dear Alice, is this the only reason why you reject me?"

"I have other objections, sir. Dr. Heath, you are rising to distinction in your profession. If you should unite your fate with one so poor and obscure as myself, you would seriously compromise your interests. Whereas, if you should marry a lady of your own station, you would greatly enhance your fortunes. Believe me, I am worldly-wise enough to understand that."

"Worldly wisdom has come too soon to you. You do not know how to apply it. Alice, I want no wife to help forward my fortunes. I think I can push forward alone, and conquer a standing-place for both myself and wife—my wife, who can be no other woman than yourself. Come, my love—come, Alice—give me a frank reply. Tell me that you will be mine."

"Francis Heath, I cannot. Do not urge me, please. The most I can do for you is, to say that if, at the end of a year, and after mature deliberation, you should feel disposed to renew this proposal, why then I may give you a different answer."

"Will you—will you, my love? Then hear me pledge myself——"

"No, no; you must not pledge yourself to anything. You must remain absolutely free to change your mind if it should so please you before the year of probation is out. That is the only possible way of testing and proving for yourself the reality and durability of your present feelings. Forgive my frankness."

"Oh, Alice, Alice, but this is a very hard condition!"

"It is a very necessary one. But I have left my patient too long already. I must go to her. Good-day, Dr. Heath."

And swiftly and silently, as a light withdrawn, Alice disappeared from the room.

It was a few hours after this that the news of the respite of Gerald Mostyn reached Radnor, and was conveyed to Mrs. Horne. The poor sufferer smiled with delight on hearing the glad tidings, and for a few days she rallied. But her health was too far gone to admit of her ultimate recovery.

If this true-hearted lover appeared, sent from heaven for the future stay and support of her helpless orphanage, Alice had another suitor that seemed as surely sent from hades for her torment and destruction.

For months past Alice had seen with shuddering fear that, whenever she chanced to be left alone with Dr. Horne, he would invariably fix his eyes upon her with a sinister and dangerous meaning.

Without seeming to notice these alarming glances, Alice would quietly withdraw from his presence, and confining herself to the sickroom of her friend, keep as much as possible from his society.

One fatal day she fell into a snare set for her destruction. Dr. Horne—as all the household supposed—left home for a day's absence.

It happened that about the middle of the afternoon Alice had occasion to go to the parlor cupboard to get a restorative cordial for her patient. Believing that her persecutor was miles away, she entered without fear or misgiving the silent and deserted room.

She had procured the article of which she had come in search, and was about to leave the room, when the figure of Dr. Horne, entering by the only door, arrested her astonished sight.

While she stood gazing upon him in a sort of panic, he quietly closed and locked the door and withdrew the

key, which he placed in his pocket, keeping his eyes upon his purposed victim all the while.

With her own gaze fixed upon the ground, Alice advanced toward the fastened door, and placing her hand upon the knob of the latch, said, in constrained tones:

"Let me pass, if you please, Dr. Horne."

He turned upon her a sarcastic gaze, and answered:

"I thank you very much for opening a conversation with me, Miss Owen. It was an honor for which I should scarcely have dared to hope, judging from your late conduct to me."

"Dr. Horne," said the maiden, with great dignity, "I came hither to procure a cordial for your suffering wife. I beg you will let me return to her immediately."

"No, Alice, not until you have heard me, for I, too, suffer, more perchance than she does. I, too, need your pity, more, I am sure, than she does."

Alice turned in loathing from him, and walked toward the window.

He followed her, and seized her hand, and held it in a firm grasp, while he said:

"Alice, there is a silent warfare between us that must come to an end. You well know its nature. You have inspired me with a passion which has destroyed my peace."

"Wretch! how dare you speak so! Think of the dying woman above-stairs, and for very pity be silent!" exclaimed Alice, blushing with indignation.

"I do think of that dying woman. Alice, she is no wife of mine. Twelve months ago she repudiated me from her heart. In a very few days she must pass from this earth, and I shall be free to wed again. Alice, return my love, and the first use I shall make of my freedom will be to make you my wife," he whispered, passing his arm around her waist, and attempting to kiss her.

"Demon! a thousand deaths would I die rather! Oh, my very ears are condemned that they have heard your words!" exclaimed Alice, breaking from him, and standing at bay.

"Fear not, Alice! I repeat that I shall use no rudeness toward you! You shall be a willing conquest or none! You despise the passion you have kindled, the pain you have caused. But, mark my words, young woman, before another week shall be over you shall sue for the love that you now reject!"

"Fiend! What if I were to expose your villainy?" she exclaimed.

"No one would believe you, Alice, that is all! You are sufficiently in my power! I delay my triumph only for some serener hour! In token whereof I suffer you to go! Pass out, fair Alice!" And holding open the door, he permitted her to retire from the room.

A chill of superstitious dread, inspired by the calm, cold cruelty of his threats, crept over the maiden as she regained her friend's sickroom. She administered the cordial to the patient, adjusted her pillows, arranged her coverlid, made her otherwise comfortable, and then sat down to reflect.

The scene that had just passed between Dr. Horne and herself rendered it absolutely necessary that she should withdraw from the house.

Her mind was now made up, and her plan arranged. She would write a note to her friend, Mrs. Osborne, requesting the shelter of her hospitable roof for a few days, until she could find another situation as lady's companion or seamstress. She would have this note ready for Francis Heath to convey to his sister.

She lost no time in carrying her plan into execution; and without hinting to her lover the reason why she

wished to leave the house, she intrusted him with the letter to be delivered.

Then she wrote a second note, addressed to Dr. Horne, and warning him to seek the services of another attendant for his wife, as she was about to leave the house. This note received no manner of reply.

But the next day, when Dr. Heath arrived on his professional visit, he brought with him a letter from Mrs. Osborne to Alice Owen, cordially offering to her a home in the parsonage for so long as she should see fit to favor its inmates with her presence. In addition to this, Dr. Heath informed Alice that his horse and gig were at her orders to convey her to the parsonage.

Alice was constrained to accept his kindness; and that very afternoon she packed up her little wardrobe and prepared to leave the house of evil. She took a tender leave of her almost unconscious patient, pressing kisses on her cold brow, and charging her old nurse, Glenn, to watch and tend her carefully. Mrs. Glenn, who was lost in amazement at this sudden flitting of Alice, promised to do all that was required of her.

Alice then went down into the hall where Francis Heath awaited to conduct her to the gig, which was standing before the door.

Her lover lifted her in, carefully arranged her seat, drew the cover up over her lap, and then went to see that her trunk was well secured behind.

During the few seconds that he was absent from her side upon this errand, Dr. Horne came out of the house up to the gig, and stooping to Alice's ear, whispered, so that no one but herself could hear:

"You think that you have eluded me, fair saint—we shall see!" And having said this, he bowed pleasantly on meeting Francis Heath, and retired to the porch.

Alice sank back in her seat, shuddering with a vague and terrible presentiment of some awful calamity at hand.

"Why—will you permit me to ask—have you left your friend, my dear Alice?" inquired Francis Heath, as he gathered up the reins and started his horse.

"Because," answered Alice, evasively, "the trials of the situation were getting too heavy for me; I should have fallen ill on their hands."

"You might, indeed. I do not think that you have had a night's rest for many weeks past. I am glad that you have left."

Alice made no direct reply; she was willing that he should remain in ignorance of the deep insult she had received, and which was the true reason of her departure from the house. As she continued silent, her lover spoke again:

"You will feel less regret in leaving your friend, from the fact that she has been much more composed in mind since she heard of the respite of Mr. Mostyn."

"Yes," answered Alice, "it is wonderful how deeply she has been affected by the whole of that tragedy from first to last. No one felt the murder of old Mr. Horne so grievously as she did; and yet she was not nearly connected either by blood or friendship with the murdered or the murderer. How strange!"

"Passing strange! But, dear Alice, why did you say the murderer? Since the revelation made to the minister by Mr. Maraudey many people believe Mr. Mostyn to be innocent."

"Oh, I would that they were right! I would that I, too, could believe that story; but, oh, sir, it can weigh nothing against the evidence of my own senses! You know what I myself saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears!"

"But what, then, Alice, can you make of this story told by Mr. Maraudey?"

"I know not! It may possibly be that the penitent in question was a madman, who only imagined what he told to Mr. Maraudey, or it may be that he was some devoted friend, more zealous than scrupulous, who took this way to save Mr. Mostyn. Has Mr. Maraudey yet given any clew to his identity?"

"No; he was brought up yesterday, when, refusing to testify, he was committed for contempt. It is a matter of conscience with him, and it is really very doubtful whether there is any law to compel him, in this case, to do so."

"One thing I know," said Alice, "that Mr. Maraudey would die in prison rather than break his oath."

"He is at least likely to remain in prison for a long time," said Dr. Heath.

They were now beginning to descend the mountain, and the road was so difficult and dangerous that her lover was compelled to give his whole attention to his horse, and the conversation ceased. When they had safely reached the foot of the pass, a few yards of level road under the shadow of the ridge brought them to the parsonage.

CHAPTER XXII.

I see the cloud and the tempest near,
The voice of the troubled tide I hear—
Thy bosom's bark on the surge I see,
But, wanderer, thy loved one is there with thee.
— L. M. DAVIDSON.

The pale clouds that had been gathering all the afternoon now overcast the whole sky. It was beginning to snow as they alighted at the parsonage gate.

"Run in! for mercy sake, run in!" cried Mrs. Osborne, appearing at the hall door.

They lost no time in obeying her summons.

"We are always bound to have at least one very deep snow, and I think that this is the very article!" said Dr. Heath, as he beat the light flakes from his own garments, and gently brushed them from those of Alice, before entering the neat hall.

Mrs. Osborne shook hands with her brother, and embraced Alice—thus giving both a warm welcome.

"You must nurse her a little; she is very much worn down," said Dr. Heath, with a glance full of affectionate solicitude directed toward Alice.

"She does look pale and anxious. But in our quiet home she will soon recover," replied the pastor's wife, tenderly kissing her guest, as she led her into the bright little parlor of the parsonage, and seated her upon the sofa by the fire.

How different was the atmosphere here! Alice felt as if she had escaped from a house of deadly peril, and passed into a home of safety and comfort.

Presently there was a ring at the door-bell.

"That is Mr. Osborne. Run, Hetty, and let your master in."

The little maid hastened to comply, but returned quickly to say:

"Please, madam, it isn't master. It is a man from Llyndell, as says how master can't just yet leave Mrs. Horton, who is took very ill, and wants the doctor directly."

"Mrs. Horton ill? I am very sorry!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne; while Francis Heath arose from his untasted supper and hurried to the door to make more particular inquiries. In a few moments he came back, greatcoated and capped, ready for his ride, saying:

"It is an attack of apoplexy. I must hasten to her immediately."

"But, dear me! Won't you stop and get your tea before turning out in this snowstorm?" inquired his sister, anxiously.

"No! There is no time—a moment's delay may be fatal to her life! Good-by!"

"When will you be back?"

"I cannot tell. It may be not until morning. Do not sit up for me!" replied the doctor, bowing and hurrying away.

"There! You see what it is to be a physician, Alice. He never sits down to a meal with any certainty of being able to finish it before he is called off; or gets into his warm bed without a reasonable probability of being called up at midnight. And you may partly judge what may be the lot of a physician's wife! Draw up, Alice. 'Let the world slide,' while we take our tea. Hetty, these waffles are cold; bring a plate of hot ones."

"I feel sorry that Mrs. Horton is ill," said Alice.

"My dear, so am I—but—it does not take away my appetite. Here come the hot waffles—take one."

'At that moment there was a second ringing of the door-bell.

"Good gracious! Surely people think we have a party here to-night. But this must be Mr. Osborne at last. Run, Hetty, and see!" exclaimed the lady.

The little servant flew to open the door.

"Those are strange voices. Who can they be?" inquired Mrs. Osborne, listening.

Her question was almost immediately answered by the reappearance of the maid, saying:

"If you please, ma'am, two men asking for Miss Alice Owen."

"For me?" exclaimed Alice, in surprise.

"For Alice!" ejaculated the lady, in astonishment.

"Yes, ma'am, please, here they are," replied the maid, as two men, recognized by Mrs. Osborne as constables, entered the parlor.

They bowed awkwardly, and hesitated a little, while the ladies gazed upon them in perplexity.

"You——did you wish to see any one here? Have you any business with us?—or—is there not some mistake?" inquired Mrs. Osborne, who was the first to recover from her surprise.

"It's no mistake, I reckon, mum. Which of you ladies is Miss Alice Owen?" inquired the foremost man, producing a document from his coat pocket.

"Why, this young lady is Miss Owen; but you can have no possible business with her!"

"Well, yes, mum; we have a little, I reckon."

"But what can it be at this time of night? Does anyone need her?"

"Well, yes, mum, I s'pose the magistrate wants her just a little."

"As a witness in some new case—what a worry!"

"Well, I reckon I might as well out with it, mum. It

is a very onpleasant thing; but you see, to make a long matter short, I have a warrant for her arrest."

"Arrest!"

"Well, yas, mum, I'm sorry to say."

Both ladies gazed with renewed astonishment upon the speaker.

"But upon what possible ground can Miss Alice Owen be arrested?" inquired Mrs. Osborne, in dismay.

"I do not owe a debt in the world!" exclaimed Alice, in consternation.

"It's not for debt, young lady," said the constable.

"In the name of Heaven, what is it for, then?" inquired Mrs. Osborne.

"Miss Alice Owen is arrested upon the charge of theft."

"Theft!"

"Well, yes, mum, I'm sorry to say."

Alice covered her face with her hands, and sank back half fainting in her chair, while Mrs. Osborne, panic-stricken, gazed upon the officers.

"Don't be frightened, mum. If the young lady is innocent, as I would lay my life she is, judging from her looks, it will all come out right before the justice," said the constable.

"But by whom is she accused—good Heaven—of theft!"

"By Dr. Horne, her late employer, mum."

"It is a plot! Oh, it is a plot for my destruction!" gasped Alice, in a dying voice.

"By Dr. Horne! It cannot be! Dr. Horne is an honorable man, who would die rather than bring such a charge against an innocent girl!" exclaimed the lady.

"But here it stands, mum, in black and white, under the county seal."

"Oh! it is a plot! It is a plot for my ruin, if you knew all!" groaned Alice.

"Be patient, dear girl! It is some grievous mistake that will be explained," said Mrs. Osborne.

"It is no mistake, I reckon, mum—I mean so far as the dokerment goes. As to the young lady, I believe it is a mistake, and will be proved one. But, mum, our time is short, and we have also another warrant here, authorizing us to search the effects of Miss Alice Owen for certain property said to have been stolen by her."

"I brought but one small trunk, which holds all my clothes. It has not been opened since I came here. Dear Mrs. Osborne, show them where it is, that they may examine it and satisfy themselves!" cried Alice seizing this opportunity of vindicating, as she supposed, her innocence.

But the trunk revealed something that produced a sensation.

"The stolen property," the officer exclaimed, as he came upon a red morocco casket, which he held up and, opening, revealed a rich set of oriental pearls.

"In the name of Heaven, what is the meaning of this, Alice?" inquired Mrs. Osborne, in horror.

"It means that I am betrayed and ruined," exclaimed the wretched girl, in a deep, sepulchral voice, as, with a face overspread with the ghastly pallor of death, she sank into the nearest chair.

"Alice, will you explain this?" cried Mrs. Osborne, in deep distress.

"As far as I can. I never set my eyes on that casket before this hour. It was put into my trunk with the design to ruin me, I am sure of it!" gasped the almost expiring girl.

"Oh, Alice! do not say so, my child. No human be-

ing could be so diabolical. Besides, what motive could any one have to ruin you? You have no enemies."

"You think, then," said Alice, in a hollow voice, "that I am capable of——"

"No, no; my life upon your innocence!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, eagerly interrupting her, "but some one certainly put the casket in your trunk for safety, and you, unconscious of its presence there, brought it away; and such will be proved the case, no doubt. What I do find fault with in this matter, is Dr. Horne's inexcusable haste in charging an innocent and respectable girl with a degrading crime! I shall not soon forgive his rashness!"

"Ah! Do you think it was rashness? It was not rashness, but the most deliberate villainy!" exclaimed the wretched girl, in bitterness of spirit.

"Alice, your wrongs make you unjust! Believe me, this is a mistake which will soon be righted!" said Mrs. Osborne, struggling with her own sense of shame and grief that she might in some sort lift up the fallen head of the poor young victim before her.

"Well, mum," said McNab, "I am sorry to hurry this affair, but it is late, and we have a long way to go to the squire's, so that the young lady had better be getting on her things."

"Getting on her things? For what?"

"To go before Squire Jessup, mum."

"Surely, surely, you will not take her out this stormy night?"

"'Bliged to do so, mum. Warrant is peremptory."

"Oh! Alice, my child, what a calamity! Oh, good heaven! How I wish Mr. Osborne or my brother were here! Sirs, cannot you wait an hour, until I send for my husband and brother, who are at Llyndell?"

"Couldn't possibly do it, mum; we have already stayed

too long," said the constable. Then, turning to Alice, he added: "Come, young lady; come, make haste!"

But the poor girl sat with her hands clasped convulsively upon her knees, the grayness of death spread over her face, and her eyes wildly staring into vacancy.

"Come, now, you know this ain't a-goin' to do. You've got to get up and come along with us; and the longer you stop us, and the more trouble you give, the worse it will look, you know," said the officer, laying his hand upon her shoulder.

Mrs. Osborne, pale and trembling, and too strongly affected for tears, took the little black straw bonnet and black cloth shawl from the bed, upon which they had been placed, and brought them to Alice.

Then the constable supported his prisoner from the house to the chaise that was waiting to take her to the magistrate's office.

And the next moment Alice was lifted into the chaise, which was driven rapidly away.

"Oh, surely this is some horrible dream!" said Mrs. Osborne, with a shudder, as she returned to the house, forgetting in her great trouble even to shake off the snow that whitened all her dress.

She lost not a moment in dispatching a messenger with the following note to Llyndell:

"Alice Owen has just been arrested upon a charge of grand larceny. For Heaven's sake, as soon as you can leave Mrs. Horton, hasten hither."

Francis Heath was standing at the bedside of his patient when that note was put into his hand. He glanced over it, passed his hand before his eyes as if to clear his vision, read it again, flushed, grew pale, seized his hat, and, without a word of explanation, hurried from the house, leaving the astonished family to suppose that some patient in the last extremity had summoned him away.

In an almost incredibly short time Dr. Heath reached the parsonage, and rushed into the parlor, where he found his sister pacing up and down the floor, and wringing her hands in great distress.

"Sister, what is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed, in breathless anxiety.

"What I wrote. She has been arrested for grand larceny, at the suit of Dr. Horne."

"False! false! Good Heaven, you are mad or dreaming to say such a thing! Where is she? Let me see her!"

"She has gone off to Gwyn in custody of the constable. Sit down, Francis, or stand if you must, only be quiet three minutes, while I tell you all about it," said Mrs. Osborne, who then, in a hurried and rather incoherent manner, related the whole history of the arrest.

"It is a mistake! It is infamous—infamous in Dr. Horne so rashly to judge, and so cruelly to charge an innocent girl." And without another word, he rushed out of the house, mounted his horse, and galloped rapidly off toward Gwyn

CHAPTER XXIII.

She feared—she felt that something ill
Lay on her life, so deep and chill—
That there was wrong and shame she knew,
Did she breathe?
Could this be still the earth beneath,
The sky above, and men around;
Or were they fiends who now so frowned
On one before whose eye each eye
Till now had smiled in sympathy?—BYRON.

Meanwhile, through the storm and darkness, the open chaise labored.

A long, dismal and dangerous drive brought Alice and the constable at length to Gwyn and to the house of Squire Jessup.

The magistrate was seated at his table, and near him also sat Dr. Horne.

"Draw forward that leathern chair, McNab," said Mr. Jessup, addressing the constable. And when the man had obeyed, he turned to Alice, and said:

"Sit down, young woman."

Alice mechanically dropped into the chair, and because she felt half suffocated, threw the veil from her face.

"So young and beautiful, and so depraved!" the magistrate murmured, as he gazed upon the soft and lovely brunette face, with its languishing, dark eyes and clustering black ringlets.

"Ah," sighed Dr. Horne, "it is with the deepest pain that I appear here as her accuser. Nothing but despair of reforming her by moral suasion—nothing but the necessity of giving her a sharp lesson (for this is not her

first offense)—nothing, in short, but a strong sense of duty—could have constrained me to prosecute her."

The justice looked at the pale girl before him, and groaned for pity.

"I am innocent; indeed, sir, I am," said poor Alice, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes pleadingly to the magistrate's face.

"Poor child! God grant you may be proved so!" said the squire.

"Did your worship, in your official career, ever happen to meet with any one who was guilty?" sneeringly inquired Dr. Horne.

Very unwillingly the magistrate proceeded with his office.

Dr. Horne, being sworn, deposed that Alice Owen had lived in his house, as the companion of his wife, for more than a year; that, during the last few months, he had missed many articles which had been traced to her possession; that upon her apparent repentance, he had frequently forgiven her; but that, finding her perfectly incorrigible, he had at length warned her to leave his house; that even then, wishing to shield her reputation, and so give her a chance of reform, he had, in discharging, forborne to accuse her, so that no one had reason to suppose that she had been dismissed, or had left the house at any other than her own will; that soon after her departure, he had chanced to open a bureau, in which the most valuable articles of family jewelry were kept, and missing his wife's casket of pearls, had naturally suspected Alice Owen of the theft, and immediately made a requisition for a search-warrant; and that, in justification of his proceeding, he begged the magistrate to swear and examine the constable who had served the warrant.

The officer being sworn, deposed to the finding of the casket of jewels in the possession of the accused.

The magistrate, whose first instinctive belief in Alice Owen's innocence now yielded to the force of evidence against her, turned toward her a countenance as full of sorrow as severity, and inquired:

"What have you to say to this charge, young woman?"

"That I am innocent! as the Lord lives, I am!" answered Alice, clasping her hands in agony.

"Your simple assertion cannot be taken against the weight of the testimony, unless you can satisfactorily account for the presence of the jewelry in your trunk," said Mr. Jessup.

"Sir, I did not know that the casket was in my trunk until the constable took it out. I never even set eyes upon the jewelry it contains, or knew so much as its existence until the moment in which the constable displayed it to my view."

"How do you suppose, then, that it came into your trunk?"

The face of the young girl crimsoned with blushes; she did not reply.

"If you can explain how it came there without your knowledge or connivance, you had better do so," said the squire.

The poor girl struggled bravely against the overwhelming sense of shame that crushed her spirit to the dust, as, amid burning blushes, she answered:

"Sir, I may not be able to prove the fact, but I think that they were put there by Dr. Horne, with the view to destroy me."

"Young woman! beware how you try to criminate a gentleman of Dr. Horne's indisputable integrity!" exclaimed the magistrate, indignant at what he supposed to be the base artifice of the accused.

"It is like her!" said Dr. Horne, coolly.

"What motive, pray, Miss Owen, could you suppose Dr. Horne to possess for injuring you?"

Alice strove more strenuously against the crushing sense of shame, and her cheeks, and brow, and neck were flushed with still more fiery blushes, as she answered:

"I must speak the truth, come what will of it, sir. This man, once my employer, and now my accuser, pursued me with a sinful suit, threatening to destroy me if——"

Unable to complete the painful sentence, Alice dropped her face in both hands, and shuddered as with an ague.

This action, that was indeed the effect of maiden modesty, looked so like conscious guilt, that the magistrate gazed upon her with his brows knit into the severest frown.

"It is precisely like all her conduct," said Dr. Horne. "You will now have an opportunity of witnessing that girl's double-distilled duplicity."

"Young woman," said the magistrate, sternly, "when you were first brought before me, your tender years and—well, yes—your refined looks, rather inclined me to think too leniently of your case, and to criticise too hastily the course of your accuser. The wickedness with which you have endeavored to shield yourself by criminating a gentleman of Dr. Horne's unimpeachable character has convinced me that you are one with whom it will not do to deal gently. The evidence against you is also convicting, and obliges me to bind you over for trial to appear at the assizes. Have you bail?"

"I have none to whom I would be willing to apply, sir."

"Then you know what follows; I shall be obliged to commit you to prison."

A low, despairing cry broke from Alice, as again she dropped her face upon her hands.

"Take courage; some friend may voluntarily come forward to-morrow to help you," said the squire, as he made out the committal.

Two constables conducted her to the chaise.

A very short drive took them to the prison gates.

Old Mr. Wardour was summoned, and the warrant put in his hands.

"And here is your prisoner," said the constable, lifting Alice from the chaise.

As they passed between the row of dark and vacant cells, they saw lights gleaming from the two opposite ones at the extreme end of the lobby.

"That on the right hand is Mr. Mostyn's; that on the left is Mr. Maraudey's. It is rather a genteel ward this, my dear; I shall put you next to the priest's, and right across from Mr. Mostyn's, so that you won't feel lonesome," said Mr. Wardour, unlocking the described cell and conducting his prisoner in.

It was a narrow space, well scrubbed and whitewashed. A still narrower bed, with coarse, clean bedding; a little stove, a stand, and a chair completed the furniture.

"Now, say your prayers and go to bed, like a good girl. If you have done wrong, ask the Lord to forgive you; if you haven't, ask Him to deliver you; He'll do either. Good-night, and God bless you, child," said the jailer, shutting the door, and softly turning the key.

He then took a step further that brought him opposite to Mr. Maraudey's cell; he peeped through the grating and saw the old man on his knees before a crucifix.

"That's all very well," said the jailer to himself; "but it would be a heap better if you'd only give up the name of that malefactor as Mr. Mostyn is a sufferin' for!"

Having delivered himself of this sentiment, the worthy jailer crossed the lobby to Gerald Mostyn's cell.

He could not peep into this cell, for a white muslin curtain, the work of Constance's fingers, was drawn across the door, as well to keep off the idle gaze of those without as to hide the ugly grating from the eyes of him within.

But Mr. Wardour rapped.

"Come in, good friend," said the sweet voice of the lady, as she recognized the rap of the jailer. He opened the door and entered.

The cell had quite changed its aspect since the respite of Mr. Mostyn.

Constance had said, cheerfully, that since he was destined to lodge there for an indefinite period, it behooved her to make the little nook habitable. With the permission of the proper authorities, who could not refuse a lady so harmless a favor, she had had the cell thoroughly cleaned and whitewashed. The narrow floor was covered with a strip of neat carpet; a small, neat bedstead, with a spring mattress, clean linen and woolen coverings, and a warm counterpane, was placed in one corner; an imported coal stove in another; a small stand with toilet fixtures in a third; and an easy-chair, covered with crimson cloth, nearly filled the remaining space. Little crimson merino and white muslin curtains concealed the bars of both the window and the door. On the wall opposite the bed three little hanging shelves supported a small collection of books. Each side, and also above this shelf, hung three small prints—that on the left the Crucifixion, that on the right the Resurrection, that above the Ascension.

If any caviler object that these comforts were unbefitting the place and the occasion, let such an one know that since the half-disclosures of the priest had necessitated the indefinite respite of the prisoner, the rigor of

the prison discipline had, by order of the authorities, been somewhat relaxed in his behalf.

And besides, to obtain these things for him, Constance had sacrificed a personal ornament and convenience—her diamond-studded gold watch—whose price had paid for the fitting up and furnishing of the cell.

By the kind sufferance of the jailer, Constance now spent much time, evening as well as morning, in her husband's cell.

When Mr. Wardour, in compliance with her request, now entered, he found Mr. Mostyn seated upon the side of the bedstead, reading to Constance, who, occupying the only chair, was engaged in some delicate needlework. A safety lamp sitting upon the little stand sufficiently lighted the cell.

Mr. Mostyn immediately laid aside his book, and invited his visitor to accept the only seat he could offer him—the foot of the bed.

"I thank you, no, sir; I came only to speak to madam. There is a poor girl in the opposite cell, whom I do wish you would have the charity to look after, madam; for I don't know but she'll die all alone this night."

"Who is she?" inquired Constance, looking up from her sewing.

"Alice Owen, the very girl as was the principal witness against your husband, although I'm here asking you to see after her, knowing as how you return good for evil."

"Alice Owen! In the name of all that is incomprehensible, how came she hither?" exclaimed Constance, in amazement, while Mr. Mostyn looked and listened with fixed attention.

"Well, ma'am, if it wasn't retribution, I don't know what else it could have been, poor thing!"

"Retribution?"

"Yes, ma'am. How came your husband here? Circumstantial evidence supported by Miss Alice Owen's testimony, and she all the while mistaken. And how comes she here? Circumstantial evidence again, supported by Dr. Horne's testimony, and he all the while mistaken, as I'll be bound to say, for if that young lady is not innocent, then I'm not such a judge of faces as I ought to be, seeing as I've had such a long experience."

"But of what, then, is the poor girl accused?" inquired Mr. Mostyn.

"Theft, sir; grand larceny, sir; that which will send her to prison for ten years, sir, if it's proved against her."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed both Gerald and Constance, in a breath.

"Yes, sir—yes, ma'am, that is it; the poor thing seems perfectly stupefied by her condition. 'Ma'am, if you take a look at her before you go, and as soon as you come in the morning, it would be a charity."

"I will certainly do so," said Constance.

"I thank you from my heart, dear lady, and if anything should be wanted—for I don't know but she is ill—you can call Tom Turner, who is at the other end of this lobby, and send for me."

"I promise you," said Constance. And with this pledge the good jailer departed.

After a little conversation between the husband and wife upon the subject of Alice's arrest, Constance rapped for Tom Turner to let her out, and crossed the lobby to the girl's cell. Looking through the grating, she dimly saw Alice sitting on the side of her cot, with her hands clasped upon her knees, and her eyes wildly staring into vacancy.

Constance rapped and called, softly:

"Alice—Alice Owen."

"Who wants me?" answered the poor girl, in a trembling voice.

"Your friend, Mrs. Mostyn. May I come in and see you?"

"As you please, lady."

Tom Turner softly turned the key, and Constance entered, and, sitting down beside Alice, silently embraced and kissed her.

For the first time since her sudden arrest, Alice burst into tears, and, dropping her head upon the lady's shoulder, wept sorely.

Constance gently soothed her with tender caresses and comforting words, until at length Alice recovered her power of speech and, between choking sobs, exclaimed:

"You—you come to me in prison, lady; you embrace me, and kiss me, and console me—me who swore away your husband's life!"

"No, poor Alice, you did not. 'God took that on Him.' My husband has been respited, and will be saved and fully vindicated. I should be a heathen to believe else."

"Ah! but then I swore away his life none the less because it was not sacrificed. Ah, lady—sweet lady! how can you endure the sight of me, much less forgive me, and come to me, and caress and comfort me?"

"Because, poor Alice, neither myself nor my honored husband can be so unjust as to blame you for that testimony, or so unfeeling as not to compassionate your present condition. Your evidence, poor girl, was given most reluctantly, as every one saw."

"Oh, it was—indeed it was! I tried to escape the subpœna."

"We know that; we also know that your testimony was given in good faith, however mistaken it was."

"And, oh, lady, do you know that since yesterday I begin to believe that I might have been mistaken?"

"And we know that you were so, dear Alice; but what, then, has raised the doubt in your mind?"

"Just this, madam—my own condition. Lady, look at me. I, even I, stand committed here upon a charge of grand larceny, supported by proof that must inevitably convict and send me to prison, unless some miracle of Divine Providence should intervene. The testimony that convicted Mr. Mostyn was not stronger than that which will convict me; and yet I am as innocent of felony as the babe unborn, and so, also, I begin to think Mr. Mostyn may well be, notwithstanding the testimony."

"And he is, dear girl, he is; and his innocence shall yet shine forth as the sun at noonday. But tell me, Alice, the circumstances that led to your arrest."

Constance listened with ever-increasing horror and amazement to the story, and when Alice had concluded the lady remained in deep and silent thought.

"There, madam—there are the facts, unsustained by proof; I know not whether you can credit the statement," said the poor maiden, hesitatingly.

"Alice, yes, at least I credit your sincerity. I have no doubt you fully believe what you tell me, but I know not what to make of it."

"Ah, you do not believe me!" said Alice, sobbing.

"Yes, I do, my poor girl. Looking in your face, dear Alice, I cannot but believe in your immaculate innocence; thinking of Dr. Horne's untarnished reputation, I cannot realize his criminality. Alice, I must have more light and better counsel upon this subject before I can give you any advice, except this—pray."

"But instead of praying, Alice bitterly wept.

Mrs. Mostyn gently assisted to undress the suffering girl, constrained her to lie down on the bed, and sat beside her, until anxiety succumbed to exhaustion, and Alice slept. Then Constance softly withdrew and left the prison.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Poise the cause in justice's equal scales.
Whose beams stand sure, whose rightful cause prevails.
—SHAKESPEARE.

While these events were transpiring in the jail, Dr. Heath, riding at full speed, entered the village, nor drew rein until he reached the magistrate's office. But it was closed up and darkened.

He alighted, walked up to the principal entrance of the dwelling-house, and knocked loudly.

A footman in livery opened the door.

"Has your master retired?" inquired the doctor.

"No, sir; but——" and the footman paused in embarrassment.

"Then take him my card, and say that I entreat him to favor me with a short interview," urged the doctor.

"Yes, sir; but——" and the servant again hesitated.

"But do my errand, friend," insisted Dr. Heath, slipping a crown into the hand of the man, an argument that never yet failed with that functionary, who bowed and disappeared within the house.

Dr. Heath remained anxiously waiting at the door until the footman returned, inviting the visitor to follow him, and led the way to a door at the extremity of the hall, which he opened, announcing:

"Dr. Heath."

The young doctor found himself in an elegantly-furnished and well-lighted library, where the worthy magistrate, in dressing-gown and slippers, reposed himself in an easy-chair, before a glowing coal fire, and beside a luxurious table, lazily enjoying his solitary bachelor supper.

He slowly arose as his visitor entered, saying, as he held out his hand:

"Welcome, Frank! May I be sent to everlasting perdition if I would have admitted another human being to my privacy to-night, excepting only yourself! What is it?"

"Mr. Jessup, it is of that most unhappy, but most innocent maiden, Miss Owen, that I came to speak to you," said the young man, very gravely.

"Eh! what!" exclaimed the justice, in surprise; "then I listen, though it were eighteen o'clock instead of eight! But sit down, man, sit down."

"I would ask you, sir, first, what has been the result of her examination?"

"I was obliged to commit her to prison for the lack of bail."

"Good Heaven! What was the evidence against this most injured and most unfortunate girl?" inquired Dr. Heath.

"Strong—very strong! The testimony of her late employer, who swore to many acts of petty theft on her part before this fatal crime of grand larceny."

"A fabrication; an infamous fabrication, sir!" exclaimed the young man, indignantly.

"Come, come, Frank, this is going too far."

"There must be some mistake, since it is utterly out of question that Alice Owen could have been guilty of theft," insisted the young doctor.

"Pooh, pooh, my young friend! If you had been a magistrate thirty years, as I have been, you would have more experience in human frailty, and less faith in fair faces. But, seriously, Frank, your great interest in this erring girl begins to give me some anxiety. Your father and I were good friends, and I should be sorry that his

son should be drawn into any—hum—ha—you understand me, Frank."

The generous blood mounted to the young man's face. His natural magnanimity prompted him at once to announce his engagement with the beautiful and unfortunate Alice, and had he himself alone been concerned, he would instantly have acknowledged his betrothal; but prudence immediately suggested that this would only draw him into a long and embarrassing controversy with the old friend of his father, which would seriously delay and impede the progress of any service he might be able to render Alice. He replied, evasively:

"I understand you, sir, and I hope you will rest satisfied with the assurance that my interest in this young lady arises from no improper or unchristian motives. I have known her long, and most favorably, and I would pledge my own honor for her spotless integrity. She is an orphan, destitute alike of money or friends. I came hither with the purpose of serving her in the best manner that I may."

"And what do you wish to do, then?"

"To offer bail for her appearance at court. You know my responsibility, I suppose, and will not object to take me for any sum that may be necessary—aye! to the whole extent of my property, if required."

"Pooh," said the magistrate, "much less than that will do. I will have her brought up again to-morrow, when you can enter into a recognizance for her appearance at the assizes."

"But to-night—cannot the business be concluded to-night?" inquired the young man, anxiously.

"At this hour? Preposterous! Impossible!" replied the justice, in a tone that admitted of no dispute.

"And must the unhappy girl spend the night in prison, then?" inquired the young man.

"Certainly, there is no possible way of helping it. Why, the prison has been closed up for hours."

"Then, at least, you will appoint an early hour of the morning for releasing her upon my recognizance?" urged Francis Heath, as he arose to take his leave.

"Cannot do that, either, I am sorry to say, my young friend. I have to meet some brother magistrates at nine o'clock and shall be occupied with them for two or three hours, after which, however, I shall be able to attend to your wishes. And as a parting advice, I counsel you not to become too deeply interested in the young girl you wish to serve. A pretty girl is a dangerous sort of a *protégée* for a young gentleman," said the magistrate, as he arose to dismiss his visitor.

With an agreement to meet the magistrate at twelve o'clock the next day, Frank took leave and departed from the house.

He found his horse, that had been refreshed by a feed and a rest, held by a groom at the gate.

Throwing the man a half-crown, he got into his saddle, and turned his horse's head down the street.

He passed the dark and massive front of the jail on the other side of the way, and his heart bled to think of Alice a prisoner within its gloomy walls.

Late as it was, he took the road leading back to the parsonage.

The way was long and difficult, and day was dawning behind the eastern mountains when Francis Heath drew rein at the gates of the parsonage.

The household was too well used to the irregular hours that his profession obliged the young physician to keep to be surprised at his very early arrival.

He was let in by his own servant, who attended him to his room, where he merely refreshed himself by his usual

morning ablutions, and by a cup of coffee, and then repaired to the library to await the rising of his sister.

Mrs. Osborne, a careful housewife, was an habitual early riser; and this morning, having a busy day before her in anticipation of the bishop's visit, she was up earlier than usual.

Hearing from the servants that her brother had got home at daybreak, and was waiting to see her in the library, she repaired thither.

On opening the door, she was so struck with the pale, worn, and anxious expression of his countenance, that, forgetting for the moment all other anxieties, she exclaimed:

"Francis, you will kill yourself. You have spent the whole night on horseback, and ridden to Gwyn and back since tea time yesterday."

"My dear sister, you do not inquire about poor Alice," said the young man.

"Yes, I do; I have not slept a wink all night for thinking of her—and of the bishop's visit. What about her? Where have you left her?"

"In the county jail!" he replied, gravely.

"In the county jail!" she exclaimed, turning very pale, sinking into a chair, and gazing in dismay upon her brother.

"Yes, in the county jail."

"Oh, heavens, what a misfortune! and what a mortification to all her friends. Have you seen her?"

"No, the examination was over before I reached the magistrate's office, and the much-injured girl had been fully committed to take her trial at the assizes."

Mrs. Osborne gazed in terror and distress upon the anxious face of her brother, but made no comment.

"But I have seen the magistrate," resumed Dr. Heath.

"And what can be done for the poor girl?"

"Nothing before eleven o'clock to-day. I offered bail last night, but it was too late for anything to be done. I appointed to meet the magistrate at eleven to-day to enter into a recognizance with poor Alice for her appearance at court. And then I rode hither to tell you the result, as well as to send a bottle of medicine to Mrs. Horton, whom I shall not be able to visit."

"But you are really not in earnest in riding back to Gwyn this morning?"

"Most certainly I shall keep my appointment with the magistrate. I will not leave poor Alice in prison one moment longer than I can possibly help."

The shade of a new anxiety crossed the brow of Mrs. Osborne.

"And when she is released upon your recognizance, what can you do with her?" she inquired, somewhat excitedly.

"Why, bring her here, of course. What else should I do with her?" said Dr. Heath, looking up in surprise.

"Bring her here! Oh, no, Frank, that would never, never do, you know!" said the lady, with a shudder.

"But I thought this was to be her home—until I should be able to provide her with another. It was your own proposal!" said the young physician, in surprise and vexation.

"Yes, Frank, but that was before this shocking affair took place. That was when no one could say anything against her character, whatever they might say against her birth and position. I treated her with affection, and tried to like her—not a difficult task, for she seemed the sweetest creature I ever saw. That I admit; but of course all that is over now. You could never think of keeping your engagement with her, and discrediting your family by marrying a girl that has been accused of theft? Nor can I, a clergyman's wife, consent to receive her here

again," said Mrs. Osborne, excitedly, while avoiding the fixed, rebuking glance of her truer-hearted brother.

"Then you absolutely refuse to shelter this innocent and most injured girl?" he inquired, in a voice full of emotion.

"I am absolutely forced to do so, from my sense of duty," said Mrs. Osborne. "But——"

"That will do," said her brother, rising.

"Now, Frank, whenever you look so grim you mean mischief. Now, what do you intend to do?" inquired his sister, in alarm.

"Release Alice Owen, to begin with," replied Dr. Heath, seizing his hat, and abruptly leaving the room to order his horse.

His sister hurried after him into the passage, but no entreaties could induce Francis Heath either to stop for the family breakfast or give any further explanation of his purpose.

"No, no, Mrs. Osborne; it is in vain to urge me; the roof that has refused to shelter an innocent girl in her utmost extremity, shall not cover the head of Francis Heath for another hour. My new office and dwelling at Gwyn is nearly ready for occupation. I should have removed thither in the spring, at all events; and even now the half-finished house may serve me at a crisis."

And waiting only long enough to dispatch his servant with the potion for Mrs. Horton, Dr. Heath threw himself into his saddle, and galloped rapidly toward Gwyn, where he arrived about nine o'clock. There he remained about two hours before he could meet Alice at the magistrate's office. His first care was, therefore, to have his horse put up at the village hotel.

He next paid a visit to the office of the registrar, where he transacted some business, of which more anon.

And, finally, he went over the way to the modest vil-

lage house that he had engaged as his office and bachelor dwelling, and directed the old woman in charge there to open and air the rooms.

When these preliminaries had been arranged, as it was now a quarter to twelve o'clock, he bent his steps toward the prison to visit Alice and accompany her to the magistrate's office to arrange for her release.

CHAPTER XXV.

Come, rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer,
Tho' the herd hath fled from thee, thy home still is here;
There still is the sky that no cloud can o'ercast,
And the heart and the home all thine own to the last.
—MOORE.

Mr. Wardour saw him from the window of his own dwelling, and, ignorant of his relation to Alice Owen, but thinking that he had come to see Mr. Mostyn, hastened to admit him.

"Come in, sir; your friend is alone, I suppose, or if not, you can wait in the office until he is ready to receive you," he said, as he let down bar and shoved back bolt to open the portals for his visitor.

"I thank you," said Francis Heath, as he walked beside the jailer toward the prison; "it is not Mr. Mostyn that I wish to see first, but a young creature whom you received here last night."

"Oh, yes, sir, that poor child! Well, just wait in the office a moment, until I go and see whether she is prepared to receive a visitor," said the jailer, showing the young man into the appointed place, and starting off to do his errand.

"An instant, Mr. Wardour, if you please. It is proper, since I make this visit, to inform you that the young lady who is to be its recipient is my own betrothed wife. Having said this much, I need not add that she is entirely guiltless of that which is falsely and cruelly laid to her charge," said the loyal-hearted young man, as he detained the jailer for a few seconds to hear this explanation.

"Really, sir, I believed her innocent from the first, and,

indeed, people ought to be made to suffer for bringing groundless charges," said the jailer, as he hastened away.

After an absence of five minutes, he returned, saying:

"You can come up now, sir. I found Mrs. Mostyn with her when I first went up, but now the lady has retired, and the girl is alone. Follow me, sir."

Francis Heath obeyed, and the jailer conducted him to the upper lobby, and to the door of Alice's cell, where he left him.

When he entered, he found her sitting upon the side of her cot, her head dropped upon her bosom, her hands clasped upon her lap, and her eyes fixed upon the floor.

"Alice, dearest Alice!"

She started up impulsively; he caught her in his arms and pressed her to his faithful heart.

"My own dear Alice! My own deeply-injured love! How pale and faint you are. Courage, sweet girl, you shall not stay here one hour longer; your wrongs shall all be righted. Sweet girl, look up," said Francis, gently caressing her.

From very faintness only, she still lay in his arms, her head drooping on his shoulder.

"Poor dove! This has almost killed you. But cheer up, my best beloved, you are not the first innocent one, by many thousands, that has been falsely accused. Cheer up, my own dear Alice!" continued her lover, striving by the tenderest words and gentlest caresses, to assuage her grief and restore her courage.

Still some moments longer, for very weakness, she rested in his arms and leaned upon his shoulder; then, with a feeble attempt to free herself, she faltered:

"Put me away, Francis. See you not the prison blot is on me, and, guilty or innocent, it will cling to me, it will cleave to me, forever and forever. But you must not share the stigma; put me away!"

"Alice," he said, in a tone of gentle reproach, "I never was guilty of a dishonorable act in all my life; would you, my bethrothed, be the first to counsel me to one?"

"I counsel you to save yourself, and to leave me to the fate which you cannot avert," said the unhappy girl, with a certain gentle firmness.

"Then you counsel me to a most dishonorable course. Alice, need I tell you that I know you to be innocent?"

"Innocent? Yes, I am innocent! God knows that I am so," said the orphan, clasping her hands, and raising her swimming eyes to heaven in the earnestness of her asseveration.

"And I know it, Alice, as I said before; and knowing this, I have neither the will nor the power to leave you to your fate."

"But, alas! You would sacrifice yourself without saving me. I am doomed, Francis; no power on earth can avert my destruction. There is evidence enough to convict me a thousand times over. Nothing but a miracle could save me!"

"Then a miracle will save you. Listen, Alice—'Innocence is the peculiar care of Providence;' trust to that alone. You will be cleared. Look at Mr. Mostyn. A miracle almost it was that intervened to save him!"

"But is he saved? Alas, he is still under sentence of death!"

"He is saved. That sentence will never be executed."

"Heaven grant it may be so," said the generous girl, almost losing sight of her own calamity in sympathy for another's.

"Amen," said the young man, fervently.

And before another word could be spoken they were interrupted by the entrance of the jailer and a constable, who came to conduct Alice Owen before the magistrate

to enter into a recognizance with her surety for her appearance before the criminal court.

They crossed the street and entered the magistrate's office.

Mr. Jessup was in his chair, attended only by his clerk.

He greeted Dr. Heath half kindly, half frowningly, and bade him and his charge be seated, while the bond of bail was made out. Alice, trembling violently, and keeping her veil closely drawn before her face, sat down to await the issue. As soon as the paper was ready, they were summoned to affix their signatures to the bond, and the business was complete. And the magistrate signified that the prisoner and her surety were at liberty to withdraw.

"Come, my dear Alice," whispered Francis Heath, as he drew her arm within his own and led her from the office.

Alice looked up in his face with an expression of helpless, hopeless misery, that seemed to ask:

"What shall I do? Whither can I go?"

There was a close carriage standing at the corner of the street, apparently waiting orders. Dr. Heath made a signal to the coachman, and the carriage immediately advanced and drew up before the office. Dr. Heath opened the door, and, holding it open, he said:

"Get in, dear Alice, and I will explain afterward."

Alice, with an appealing gaze of utter helpfulness and perfect trust, obeyed.

Dr. Heath paused a moment to direct the coachman, in a low voice, to drive to Gwyn Old Church, that was situated in the eastern suburbs of the town, and then entered the carriage and took his seat beside Alice.

They rode on in silence for a few minutes, Dr. Heath apparently plunged in deep thought, and Alice watching

his countenance in anxious affection. At last she summoned courage to ask:

"Where are you taking me, Dr. Heath? Not back to the parsonage, I hope. Oh, no! I should but be an embarrassment to your dear sister."

"No, sweet Alice, I am not taking you back to the parsonage. It is full of company by this time, drawn together to meet the bishop, and no place for my 'stricken deer,'" replied Francis Heath, tenderly.

"Where, then—where, then, are you taking me, Dr. Heath? Ah, do not embarrass yourself with one so utterly and irretrievably lost as myself. Listen. I have thirty shillings left. For that money some poor cottager might receive me for the few days that must intervene before my trial—and then——" She paused and grew pale.

"And then, Alice, what then?" asked the young man, tenderly taking her hand.

"The Lord will take care of the rest," she said, in a low and reverent tone.

"He will; but He works by human means, sweet girl. Listen to me, my love. Alice, you have neither father nor mother, sister nor brother, nor even uncle, aunt, or cousin. You are a desolate and helpless orphan. You have no near friend but myself, your lover. Dear Alice, this is no hour, indeed, for false scruples, and what I wish to say is this—that you must immediately give me a husband's right to protect you."

"Francis, you do not mean it!" exclaimed the orphan, thrilled to the heart.

"I mean, dearest Alice, that within this hour you must become my wife!"

"Francis! Francis! would you indeed thus devote yourself to a lost and wretched girl like me?"

"I would devote myself to a much-injured and most

innocent maiden, whom I love from the depths of my heart."

"Oh, my knight! my royal-hearted knight! Would you even ruin yourself for me?" she exclaimed, trembling with mixed emotions of joy and grief, admiration and gratitude.

"There will be no ruin, dear girl. Alice, I have faith in the Lord. I walk by faith, and not by sight. Knowing you to be innocent, I feel it to be my duty as well as my inclination to stand by you. To do this blamelessly I must have a recognized right to protect you. I must become your husband, and that within this hour."

"Oh, Francis Heath, best and noblest friend! I cannot, ought not, to burden you with my great misfortunes. It would be wrong! Do not tempt me to do such wrong; I am not strong enough to resist; I have been so terrified and weakened; I am not fit to be your wife; I am but a poor, hunted, cowering hare, whose only wish is to creep away to some quiet spot and die in peace. Find me only such a place, good friend; then go and leave me to my fate," muttered Alice, in a voice vibrating with emotion, while the tears streamed down her face.

He gathered her tenderly to his bosom, wiped the tears from her eyes, stopped her further words with kisses, and laid her back among the cushions for a moment, while he searched in his pocket and drew forth a paper, which he exhibited to her, saying:

"This, Alice, is our marriage license. Before coming to you this morning, I went to the registrar's office and procured it; for I had resolved not to make my appearance before you without it. I then spoke to Mr. Miles, the curate, who officiates at Glyn Old Church, to meet us there with his two sisters to act as witnesses to our marriage. They none of them know anything of you or your

misfortunes, so that you need not shrink from seeing them."

By this time the carriage had drawn up before the entrance of the churchyard.

Dr. Heath alighted and handed out his companion, and, drawing her arm within his own, led her into the church.

The curate, an old man, with thin, white hair, was already in his place, attended only by the parish clerk. Two elderly ladies, his sisters, were seated in a front pew, waiting to render the assistance required of them. These four persons were the only occupants of the church at the moment that Dr. Heath, with Alice Owen on his arm, entered the aisle.

He led his bride up before the altar, and named her to the curate and the two elderly ladies, who immediately joined the group.

The marriage ceremony commenced; the parish clerk gave away the bride, and at the close of the service the small party adjourned to the vestry to witness the registry of the marriage.

When these forms were over, the usual congratulations were tendered and accepted, the old curate was made happy in the possession of the largest fee he had ever received, Dr. Heath drew the arm of Alice within his own, and led her from the church.

He placed her in the carriage, stopped as before to direct the coachman where to drive, then entered and seated himself by her side.

"You are my own Alice, now, whose honor and reputation I will protect and defend against the whole world," he whispered, drawing her to his faithful bosom, upon which she dropped her young head, weeping strange tears of mingled sorrow and joy—sorrow at the remembrance of the dark fate that still threatened her, joy in the possession of the noble heart which had become her shelter.

A half-hour's drive brought them before a modest, two-story stone house, having a central door, with a window on each side, and three windows above. A small yard, filled with evergreen shrubbery, separated it from the street.

The doctor alighted, handed out Alice, and led her through the green, wooden gate, and up to the house.

He knocked, and a matronly woman, neatly dressed, opened the door and curtsied.

"This is my wife, your mistress, Martin," said the doctor, as he led Alice in.

The woman curtsied again, opened a second door in the right of the passage, and admitted them into a clean, cheerful, plainly-furnished parlor, where a bright fire glowed and a table was laid.

"You are so exhausted with all the excitement you have gone through, let me take your bonnet and shawl off here, dear Alice, and do you rest on this sofa until you have recovered yourself," said Dr. Heath, tenderly removing her wrappings, which he gave to the old servant, who took them from the room, and then drawing forward a soft sofa, upon which he persuaded her to repose for a few minutes while breakfast was brought in.

As soon as the servant was gone, he bent over her pale face, and, kissing her tenderly, said:

"This is your home, dear Alice. Let me make you most welcome to it."

Alice blessed him with her soft, dark eyes, and then expressed some surprise that this "home" should have been so ready for them.

"Sweet Alice, it is not half ready. There are but three rooms furnished in it—this parlor, a chamber immediately above it, and a kitchen behind it. There is not even accommodation for Martin, who is obliged to leave every night and return. She has a key to let herself into the

kitchen. You must know that I took the house just as it was given up by my predecessor, Mr. Thorne, who sold me his medical practice here. He was an eccentric bachelor, who kept no company, and furnished no more rooms than were absolutely necessary to his own accommodation. His oddities made him unpopular, and his unpopularity made him hate the place. So he sold his small practice and his establishment here even below its value, and took himself and his eccentricities off to India. I hope to do better; to have a larger practice, as well as a better furnished house," said Francis Heath, smiling.

Martin now entered with coffee, toast, boiled eggs, broiled ham and chicken, which she neatly arranged upon the table.

Dr. Heath led Alice to the table, and, selecting for her plate the most delicate morsels on the board, pressed her to partake of them.

When the breakfast was over, he seated her comfortably in an easy-chair, put a footstool under her feet, placed an illustrated volume of Shakespeare on the stand beside her, and then said:

"I have one or two of Thorpe's permanent patients, chronic hypochondriacs, to see to-day, dear Alice, so I must leave you for an hour or two. I will call and ask Mrs. Mostyn to come to you for a little while. Do not think, dearest; make yourself comfortable; read, do anything rather than think while I am away."

And kissing her tenderly, and bidding her trust in Heaven, Dr. Heath withdrew and left the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The prayer of Ajax was for light;
Through all that dark and desperate fight;
The blackness of that noonday night,
He asked but the return of sight
To see his foeman's face.

Let our unceasing, earnest prayer,
Be, too, for light, for strength to bear
Our portion of the load of care
That crushes into dumb despair
One half the human race.

When Alice told her husband of Dr. Horne's persecution, Francis was filled with a fierce desire to destroy him. But Dr. Horne evaded his clutch successfully, till one morning Francis Heath saw his enemy enter Radnor's Ruin. He ran up the steps impetuously and demanded an interview.

"Yes, sir, but——" said the servant, hesitating.

"But what, you stupid fellow? What subterfuge now?" exclaimed the young gentleman, chafing with anger and impatience.

"Why, perhaps you are not aware, sir, that my mistress is dying, and my master was summoned in haste to come to her."

"Dying! your mistress, Dr. Horne's wife, dying!"

"As I just had the honor to inform you, sir."

"I believe you are deceiving me," thought Francis Heath, fixing a penetrating gaze upon the servant. "Since when has Mrs. Horne been worse?"

"Ever since she heard how Miss Alice Owen was taken up for steal——"

"Silence, villain!" thundered the young man, in a tone

that made the servant turn deathlike with terror. Then blaming himself for having spoken so furiously to a poor wretch, who parrotlike, only repeated what he had heard, he inquired, with a calmer manner:

"How long has Mrs. Horne been supposed to be dying?"

"Ever since she heard what I told your honor," replied the man, cautiously.

His report was soon confirmed by the old nurse, who chanced to pass through the hall in going downstairs upon an errand. And thus it was evident, even to the natural incredulity of the frequently-deceived and baffled inquirer, that the mistress of the mansion was really in the last extremity, and thus also it followed that, as he could not properly call a man from the bedside of a dying wife, justice must remain for the present in abeyance.

At sunset that evening Mrs. Horne expired. And poor Alice, hearing of the event, found tears to spare from her own personal sorrows to give to the memory of her earliest friend.

On Sunday the funeral of Mrs. Horne was solemnized with great pomp.

A day or two later the spring term of the criminal court opened, and Alice Owen was tried. The evidence was strong enough to convince the jury, and a verdict of "guilty" was returned.

Francis Heath went back to the desolate home, and Alice was taken to her cell, where she lay with her pale hands pressed upon her eyeballs, and her wildly disheveled black hair streaming over the coverlid.

Constance, watching beside her, saw her increasing pallor and faintness, and then bending over her, whispered:

"Alice, dear, had you not better take something to sustain your strength?"

"No, dear lady," replied the feeble voice; "I only wish to sleep. Bid me good-night, and leave me to repose."

"I will sit with you until you slumber, then I will go," replied Constance.

"Stoop over me and kiss me, then, for I am going to sleep," murmured the failing voice.

Constance bent and kissed her again and again.

"There, that will do, sweet lady. God bless you, God love you, God comfort you in all your sorrows, as you have sought to comfort me. Good-night," said the poor girl, and, pressing the hands of Constance to her heart and to her lips, she resigned them, and laid her own hands up over her eyes as before.

Still Constance sat and watched, and soon, by her regular breathing, she believed the sufferer to be at last asleep. She stooped over her and gazed upon her, to assure herself of the fact, and then, feeling reasonably certain that, for the present, the sorrows of that poor young heart were soothed in slumber, she softly sank down upon her knees beside the bed, and earnestly prayed for the deliverance of the innocent captive.

Then Constance arose, and giving another look to Alice, and feeling further convinced of the depth of her repose, she gentled tapped upon the door, and beckoned Tom Turner, on guard in the lobby, to come and let her out. The good-natured turnkey hastened to set the lady at liberty, and when she had left the cell, he relocked the door, for, since her conviction, poor Alice had been a close prisoner.

Constance retired to her lodgings in the warden's house; but, despite the utter weariness of her many nights' watching, she could not sleep. The thought of that poor, innocent, persecuted girl, and her hideous fate, kept her awake until very near the morning, when, from sheer prostration, she fell into a disturbed slumber.

It was yet early when she awoke; her first returning thought was of Alice. She started up, dressed, and hurried to the jail. She was soon admitted to the upper lobby. She looked through the grating of Alice's cell, and, as she gazed, a piercing cry broke from her lips—for there lay the hapless girl, prostrate upon her back, her head upwards across the pillow, her face dark and pallid; her lips blue and rigid; her eyes wide open and stony in their sockets; her hands, that had slipped away from her face, tightly contracted, as if she had died in struggles. One moment after the cry of horror had escaped her lips, Constance stood and gazed, and then rushing from the cell door, she called:

"Mr. Turner, Mr. Turner, for the love of Heaven, come here! She is dead—dead in her prison cell!"

Quick as lightning, Tom Turner came running from the other extremity of the lobby, and in an instant unlocked the door.

Constance burst in, and lifted the head of the lifeless girl, while the turnkey followed and stood beside her, wringing his hands, and crying:

"Oh, poor thing! poor thing!"

"Mr. Turner, run; run and bring a doctor. Life may not yet be extinct."

The good-natured officer hastened away to do his errand; but, ere he reached the head of the stairs, he saw Dr. Heath, who had just gained admittance, coming up. Wanting the moral courage to tell him what had happened, the turnkey only beckoned him to come faster, and led the way to the cell. Without suspicion of the event, Francis Heath hastened up the lobby and entered the cell, where he found Alice lying as we have described her, and Constance standing beside the bed, desperately trying to rub warmth into the lifeless hands.

He saw the truth at the first glance, looked for an in-

stant as if turned to stone by the sight; then rushing to the bedside, he caught the body up in his arms, gazed into the face, laid it down again, rubbed and chafed the hands; groaned, invoked her by every fond epithet to revive, to return to life; called upon God and angels to give her back to his love; then finally he rushed from the cell, and, after an absence of a very few minutes, returned with powerful stimulants, some of which he poured into the lifeless lips, and with some of which he chafed the frozen temples and rigid hands.

Useless his efforts! He seemed to know they were so even while he continued them.

Suddenly he laid them all aside, took a spring lancet from a little pocket-case, stripped up the sleeve of her left arm, and opened a vein; but not one drop of the coagulated vital fluid flowed out to give him hope of returning life.

Useless all! He felt it now, and closed his lancet, drew down her sleeve, reverently laid her body back upon the cot, and stood gazing upon it—the image of utter despair.

"Dear friend, be comforted. Oh, be sure it is better as it is," prayed Constance, through her streaming tears.

But he stood as if frozen to the spot, gazing upon the rigid form.

As yet the news of her death had not spread even though the prison.

Tom Turner stood at the cell door, with his thin, sharp face still more contracted through sorrow and sympathy, when the step of the jailer was heard along the lobby.

He came, followed by an officer. Evidently neither of them knew anything of what had occurred; for as they approached the cell, the sheriff said to the jailer:

"Go in, if you please, and let the prisoner know that she should be ready in fifteen minutes to take the road."

But as they appeared at the door, Constance met them, and said:

"Mr. Wardour, your prisoner has escaped you."

"Escaped!" re-echoed the officer, in consternation.

"Ay, she is at liberty."

"At liberty!"

"Even so; her case has been reviewed by a higher tribunal; her sentence has been reversed by a higher Judge, from whose decision there is no appeal."

"Madam, what mean you?" asked the officer, in vague foreboding.

"Come and see," said Constance.

They entered the cell.

"Dead!" exclaimed the sheriff, in horror, as his eye fell upon the figure on the cot. "Dead!"

"Nay," replied Constance, solemnly, "the damsel is not dead, but liberated."

In deep awe the sheriff drew nearer and gazed upon the lovely lifeless form lying extended on the cot, as still, as cold, and white as some beautiful marble effigy; and then silently withdrew from the cell.

It was then that Tom Turner, looking from the window, saw Dr. Horne, and uttered his name.

At the sound of that name, Francis Heath suddenly raised his head like a stanch hunter that sniffs the game, and, starting up from his kneeling posture beside the cot, he rushed to the window and looked out, and then darted from the cell. And in less time than it will take to write the words, he was heard hastening up the stairs, and dragging something along the lobby. And the next instant he appeared at the door, his complexion livid, his eyes blazing, his arm nerved by fierce anger, his hand upon the collar of Dr. Horne, whom he literally dragged, trembling, cowering, and almost unresisting, into the cell.

Forcing him to the side of the cot, he pointed to the lifeless figure, and said:

"There, murderer, look upon your work!"

"Madman! let go my collar!" gasped the strongly-agitated man, feebly struggling.

But the hand that was upon him was like the hand of a giant.

"Look upon your work!" he repeated, in a hoarse whisper; "and after this looking, for you, and from me, there will be yet another,—'a fearful looking for of judgment!'" and, tightening his grasp, he raised and hurled the miscreant with such force from the cell that he fell prostrate upon the floor of the lobby.

Those who beheld this scene, regarded it with breathless amazement. That Dr. Horne, a fine, athletic man, should have suffered himself to be dragged like a slave to the cell of his victim, held there and forced to look upon her, and then hurled like a dog through the door—that his face should have blanched, his teeth chattered, and his frame shake, so as to leave him powerless in the grasp of his enemy—was incomprehensible. They looked after him, saw him lift himself from his humbled position, and heard him mutter, "He is mad; he need not be minded," as he slunk away from the spot. They could not understand it.

After the delay of several hours consumed in the usual medical investigations, the body of Alice was pronounced quite dead, and given up to the disposal of her friends.

CHAPTER XXVII.

How sweet her sleep where all is peace,
Where sorrow cannot reach her breast,
Where all life's idle throbbings cease,
And pain is lulled to rest—
Such balmy rest, where, peril past,
The weary wins a deep repose,
And the bruised spirit finds at last
A cure for all its woes.
The breath of slander cannot come
To break the calm that lingers there,
There is no dreaming of her doom,
No waking to despair;
No calumny can wound her more,
And all earth's bitterness is o'er.

How sweet that deep repose to gain,
And slumber in that deathless sleep,
From which she'll never wake to pain
And never rise to weep;
For she's won her way thro' the tempest's roar,
And laid her down on the golden shore.

To avoid annoyance from the curiosity of the crowd, it was arranged that the body of Alice Heath should be removed under the shadow of night from the prison to the house of her husband.

Accordingly, at ten o'clock, when all the village was still, the fair form of the unfortunate girl, arrayed in its grave clothes, was tenderly deposited in a coffin, reverently borne out, and placed in the hearse that waited before the gate, and slowly driven down the street toward the doctor's dwelling.

Francis Heath, broken in heart and crushed in spirit, walked mournfully with uncovered head beside it until it reached his own door.

Then the coffin was taken out of the hearse, and reverently borne into the house, deposited upon a table in the center of the front room on the left-hand side of the entrance hall, and directly opposite the furnished parlor, to which Alice, as a "mourning bride," had been first introduced.

This room was very nearly bare of furniture, but the care of the old housekeeper had kindled a fire and placed chairs around the hearth for the watchers.

When the bearers of the coffin had placed their precious burden on the table, they looked at the heart-broken young husband for further orders.

"I thank you, there is no more that you can do to-night. The funeral will move from this house to Gwyn Old Church on Monday. Request your master to call on me here to-morrow morning for further instructions," said the doctor.

The undertaker's men bowed in silence and withdrew, leaving the bereaved alone with his dead.

Long, long he remained plunged in deep despair. At length, with an insatiable hunger of the heart to behold the features of his beloved, the young man slowly arose, and once more uncovered the face of the dead, murmuring:

"Sweet, sweet face! oh, my darling, whither now has fled the pure spirit that lately looked forth from those closed eyes, spoke with those mute lips? Whither, oh! whither? Ah, my Alice, could I but draw the veil that hides the invisible from mortal eyes as easily as I draw this from your face! could I gaze but for an instant on your sainted spirit as I gaze now upon its beautiful clay! could I indeed see with my own eyes that you are really living and blessed in some brighter sphere; methinks I might be resigned—knowing that it is well with you—to drag out the remainder of my pilgrimage alone on earth.

But, oh! mystery of death! mystery of mysteries! who shall solve it?"

He remained gazing a long time in silence upon the beautiful, calm face, and then once more murmured:

"Is it well with you, my beloved? Is it well with you, my Alice? Oh! that you could answer! Oh! that your spirit could speak to me! It may not be; we die and make no sign! We enter, each one alone, into the great secret, and send no token after us. And this cold clay is all that is left of you, my darling, my darling! and even this in a few short days must be hidden from my sight. Let me gaze upon it while yet I may! While yet I may, let me press my lips to yours! Would they could breathe into yours my own breath of life!"

And stooping down he pressed his lips to hers. Why did he start back and gaze like one bereft of his senses? Why did he murmur to himself:

"Oh, it is just as old Martin said, this watch has been too much for my reason; my very senses play me false."

The lips that he had pressed were warm and elastic!

He next started from his panic-stricken attitude, rushed to the mantleshelf, seized and snuffed the candle, and darted to the side of the coffin.

Holding the candle so as to throw its full light upon the face within, he gazed intently upon it.

That face had changed its aspect within the hour. The lips were warm and red, as with returning life; the cheeks were faintly flushed; the eyes were half-unclosed, and soft and bright, as with a semi-consciousness of light. He gazed upon that face for a moment, while his heart beat so thick and fast that it threatened to suffocate him. He lifted one of her hands; it was warm and limber, and remained in his as if half-sensible of the hold.

Then the truth rushed upon him with the force of an electric shock.

She was not dead! she lived!

This was one of those cases of catalepsy, or apparent death, of which he had met so many in his medical readings, though he had never before seen one in his whole practice.

"Not dead! not dead! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!" he cried, in a transport that shook his whole frame.

Nothing but the imminent necessity of collecting and concentrating his faculties for this great crisis; of rendering instantaneous aid to Alice, to fix the fluctuating flame of life that might even yet expire; and of providing at once for her present and future security, could have enabled Francis Heath to conquer the storm of emotions in his own breast, and address himself promptly to the work of resuscitation.

His heart still beat fast and thickly with the contending passions of astonishment, rapture, and terror—astonishment at the unexpected revival; rapture in the thought that Alice still lived; and terror in the possibility that she might again speedily sink into death, or live only to languish out her days in a prison.

First to save her life, and then to secure her flight and provide for her safety. These imminent necessities pressed upon his heart with a force that calmed its wild throbbings, if it did not even stop the current of blood.

All these rapid thoughts and emotions passed in one minute from the instant at which he had discovered her to be alive, for no more time did Francis Heath spend in inaction.

First he glided swiftly and silently to the door of the kitchen, where Martin watched. He listened, and found by her deep breathing that the old woman was fast asleep in her chair. Then he sped silently back to the room of death, and carefully and tenderly lifted the light body of Alice from her premature coffin, and carried her upstairs

and laid her upon the bed. It was but the work of a moment to take off the frightful winding sheet and shroud, and to wrap the chilled form in a white flannel dressing-gown. There was a smoldering fire in the fireplace, the side bricks of which were old and worn.

Francis Heath did not hesitate to take the poker and force out three or four hot bricks from the moldering sides to wrap up in woolen cloths, and apply to the feet, knees, and shoulders of the cold form, as the speediest means of relief.

Then from his medicine closet in the right-hand of the chimney, he procured hartshorn, with which he briskly rubbed her temples and the palms of her hands, occasionally stopping to apply it to her nostrils. While thus engaged in trying to bring her back to full life and consciousness, he was hastily revolving in his mind whether he should take old Mrs. Martin into his confidence, or find some pretext to dismiss her from the house, so as to leave him a clear field for his operations.

A little reflection, however, was sufficient to convince him that he would never be able to conceal Alice without the assistance or connivance of a third party; and there was no one in the world so likely to give him assistance and to keep his counsels as the old servant of his family, who had been devoted to him from his infancy, and had followed all the varying fortunes of his orphan boyhood and youth with unflinching steadfastness, and whose sympathies had been recently so deeply interested in the fate of his unhappy young wife.

In a word he determined to trust Mrs. Martin with this precious secret.

But for the present he would not leave Alice: her life was flowing slowly back. Her heart fluttered faintly, and her lungs trembled with the shock of the returning tide;

then her fair face quivered, and her dark eyes opened and stared into vacancy.

"Alice—Alice, love!" said her husband, addressing her in a low, cautious voice.

The staring eyes lowered their glance to the level of his face, and softened into consciousness as they recoginzed him.

"Alice, dear Alice! how is it with you?"

"Is it you, Francis, dear, only friend?" she murmured, softly, keeping her eyes fixed upon him.

"Yes, dear Alice; how are you?"

"I—do not know; where am I?" she asked, with a bewildered look.

"You are in your own room at home, sweet Alice, and I am by your side," said Francis Heath, tenderly.

"Yet, I fell asleep in my cell. How came I here?"

"Your sleep was very sound, sweet Alice, and you were brought here during its continuance."

"And would they let you do that? Oh, I was condemned, you know, and was to be sent——" She paused, and grew so deadly pale, that her husband became seriously alarmed, but composing himself, he answered, calmly:

"Fear nothing, dear Alice, you are free! Nothing can harm you more."

"Free! free! Did the pardon come at last?" she inquired, eagerly.

"The order for your liberation came last night, dear Alice—(from God)," mentally added the young man.

"Free! free! oh, thank—thank Heaven!" exclaimed the poor girl, bursting into tears of joy."

"But how is it with you, dear Alice? Are you in any pain? Is it difficult for you to speak?"

"Oh, no, no; I am at ease, and so happy—so happy to be free, to be with you."

"But you are weak!"

"Oh, I feel faint and light; but that is nothing. I am so—so happy."

He went to his medicine closet and poured out a cordial, which he caused her to drink. Then he arranged her pillows, and said:

"Now, can you rest here quietly, dear Alice, while I go below to give some directions?"

"Oh, yes, I shall lie here, and return thanks to the Lord for my deliverance. But how strange it was that I should have slept so soundly as to be brought here without being awakened," she said, wonderingly.

"It was the deep sleep of an exhausted mind and body, dear Alice, so think no more about it, love," said Dr. Heath, tenderly smoothing her dark hair before he left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

What is past is past recalling,
But the future still is thine;
There the star of hope forever
Into steadfast eyes will shine.
Weep no more, thy spirits failing,
Strive to see the light afar;
Courage! Onward! See before thee
Hope's celestial guiding star.

He went downstairs to arouse the old housekeeper, and to confide to her the wondrous secret of his wife's resuscitation. When he entered the kitchen, he found the good woman sleeping in her armchair in the corner. He shook her gently, saying:

"Martin, Martin, wake up, good woman."

She started, and rubbed her eyes, exclaiming:

"Is it you, Master Francis? What a night you must have had. What would you like? I will make you a cup of tea directly."

"Come into the parlor with me, Martin, I have something particular to say to you," replied the young man, gravely.

The housekeeper arose and followed her young master.

"Martin," said Dr. Heath, "have you ever in your life heard of a case of suspended animation?"

"Sir?"

"Have you ever, then, heard of a case of apparent death?"

"'Apparent death,' Master Francis?"

"Yes, have you ever known an instance of a person lying apparently dead for hours and then recovering?"

"Lord preserve your reason, Master Francis! I have

heard of such things, but I never knew a case of the kind in my whole life. What puts such strange notions into your head? Oh, I said this deathwatch wasn't good for you," sighed the old woman, uneasily.

"Those cases of suspended animation, apparent death, or catalepsy, are well known to us of the medical profession, though infrequent," said the doctor, while the old housekeeper continued to gaze upon him uneasily.

"Such a case, Martin, has recently come to my knowledege—a case that interests me more nearly than my own life. You have heard that your young mistress died suddenly, or rather that she was found dead in her bed yesterday morning?"

"Yes, yes, Master Francis. In the name of Heaven, what is it that you are going to tell me?"

"While I watched by the side of my young wife tonight I thought I detected in her signs of returning animation. A further examination proved my suspicions to be correct. In a word, Martin, here was a case of apparent death only, and she lives," said the young man, in a voice broken with emotion.

"Oh, Master Francis, can this be possible!" cried the old woman, trembling with agitation.

"It is true as that I stand here. I took her from her coffin, bore her upstairs, laid her on the bed, and removed the cerements of the grave from her sight before I brought her to the consciousness of surrounding circumstances. She is awake now, but knows nothing of her supposed death and intended burial. She thinks that she has been pardoned, and has been brought here while in a deep sleep; and she must never know any better."

The housekeeper could only stare at him in unutterable astonishment.

"And now, Martin, attend to me. I do think you love me?"

"I took you from your dear, lost mother's breast when she died, Master Francis; I nursed you at mine, and I love you as my own son."

"I know you do; and I think also that you love the poor, innocent, unhappy girl whom I made my wife?"

"I do, indeed, poor dear."

"And you would do anything in your power to save her from the dangers that surround her?"

"Indeed, Heaven knows that I would," said the housekeeper, fervently.

"Then, Martin, first of all you must swear that you will never divulge to a living creature the secret that I have told you to-night—the secret of my wife's recovered life."

"May my body and soul perish the day that I divulge your secret, or do the least thing to betray you or her," said Martin, clasping her hands.

"And now go quickly and prepare some nourishment for your mistress, and take it to her, while I find something with which to fill the empty coffin, which must be screwed down before any one comes to the house," said Francis Heath.

They separated about their several errands. Mrs. Martin went into the kitchen to prepare a basin of wine-whey; and Francis Heath passed out of the back door, and sought an old lumber shed, where he found a log that suited his purpose. Bringing this into the house, he wrapped it first in a woolen table-cover, and then in a sheet, and placed it in the empty coffin, where he carefully fitted it, and closely covered it with a second sheet, tucking in the ends, to make all tight. Then he replaced the lid of the coffin, and screwed it securely down. He next raised it and satisfied himself that the muffled log did not shake about, and that its weight nearly corresponded to that of the body it replaced.

He then put the room in order and locked it up.

He next went upstairs to visit Alice, who, refreshed by a wash, a change of clothes, and a basin of wine-whey, was now lying comfortably in bed, enjoying a light and easy slumber.

Perceiving this, he beckoned Mrs. Martin to follow him, and led the way downstairs to the parlor, where they sat down for further consultation.

"You must know, Martin, that I have put a muffled billet of wood of a good size in the coffin, and screwed the lid securely down. This will be supposed the dead body of your mistress, and the funeral must proceed as previously arranged. No one but you and myself must suspect that she has been really resuscitated and is now living."

"I understand that, sir."

"And when she is believed to be dead and buried we must take her off in the night to some place of concealment, where she may remain in safety until we can get her out of the country."

"Yes, sir, I see all that is necessary; but where can we take her?"

"That is what I have been thinking of, and wished to consult you upon. Is your old cottage in Horne's Hole let yet?"

"Lord, no sir; ever since the murder of old Hugh Horne and the finding of the clothes in the rock behind the hut, you couldn't get a living soul to go near it, much less live in it. The little place used to bring me in a good ten pound a year, and now it is as good as gone to me."

"Let me see—that cottage I think is far removed from any human habitation, except the deserted house of Horne's Hole?"

"Yes, sir; it is quite on the verge of the estate, a good mile from the Hall, and, indeed, it is nearer to Radnor;

but Radnor is on the other side of the mountain, where there is no pass."

"It is the very house for me. Is the furniture still in it?"

"Lord, yes, sir; such as it is—plain stuff—all just as I left it when I came here to take care of this house."

"Then there we will go with our precious charge. I know that, however plain it may be, your furniture is clean and comfortable; and to your house will I take Alice, and leave her in your care until I can withdraw her from the country. Being supposed dead and buried, there at least she can remain in concealment and safety. And now let us have a little breakfast, and address ourselves to the day's business."

"The kettle is boiling, sir; and you shall be served in five minutes," said the housekeeper, hurrying to lay the cloth.

Dr. Heath, meanwhile, slipped upstairs to take another look at Alice. Finding her in a deep, healthful sleep, that was likely to last for hours, he locked the door securely on the outside, put the key in his pocket for safety, and returned below to open the house.

The sun was now rising, and the world was all astir; and Mrs. Martin had his breakfast ready in the parlor.

After the morning meal, the doctor, with many fresh charges of secrecy and discretion to his housekeeper, went into the opposite room to await the coming of the undertaker.

That functionary soon presented himself. After the usual lugubrious salutations, Dr. Heath said:

"In view of the distressing circumstances that attended my dear wife's fate, of course it is desirable that the funeral should be as unostentatious as possible."

"Of course, of course, dear sir," groaned the undertaker.

"To-morrow, therefore, attended by the two carriages requisite to convey the clergyman, myself, and the pall-bearers, it will proceed from this house to Gwyn Old Churchyard, where I directed you to have a grave prepared. I believe this is all I have to say. The details I will leave to your own discretion."

"I will attend to everything with the greatest care and dispatch. And now I will not prolong a painful interview, or intrude upon you longer," said the undertaker, rising to go.

After his departure, Dr. Heath fastened up the front door, and had the house to himself and his small family for the rest of the day. He went frequently to the door of Alice to listen if she was awake. At last, toward midday, hearing her stir, he unlocked and entered the room.

Finding her much restored by her healthful sleep, he made her partake of a basin of chicken broth, and then sat down beside the bed to converse with her.

"Oh, Francis," she said, as soon as the housekeeper had left the room, "the last few weeks seem to me like a dreadful dream, from which I have awakened, or a horrible brain fever, from which I have recovered—to be lying here in my own comfortable bed, with you sitting by my side, and with good Martin coming in and out to do me service, and with none but kind looks and kind words around me—to have no fear of evil men or anything that can hurt me! Ah, Francis, it is like passing from the torment of purgatory to the peace of paradise. It is like entering the heavenly gates!" she finished, with the sigh of a great deliverance.

He smiled on her, and smoothed her hair with his hand. Not for the world would he have hinted to her that she had really passed through the valley of the shadow of death to reach this rest and peace, or that her danger was not really past; that at any hour in which her ex-

istence might be casually discovered she was liable to arrest and imprisonment to serve out the term of her sentence.

No, she had naturally adopted the opinion that she had been pardoned and liberated, and not for the universe would he have disturbed her peace by telling her the contrary.

"Dear Francis," she continued, with a smile of seraphic peace, "I feel so much lighter and more hopeful since I am free; for though the pardon has not cleared me from the imputation of guilt, yet I feel sure in my own mind that I shall not long suffer under it. That man's conscience, seared as it is, cannot rest under the weight of so heavy a crime as that he has committed against me. It will force him to confess his own guilt and clear me. I feel as sure of what I say as I do of the existence of God."

"I do believe, dear love, that in the Lord's own time your innocence shall be made as clear as day," replied Dr. Heath, caressing her brow with his hand, "but in the meantime, my beloved Alice, you must not stay here amid scenes associated with so much injustice, persecution, and misery. You must keep quietly in bed for a couple of days to prepare you for the fatigue of a journey. I intend to take you to a quiet, secluded cottage among the mountains, where you are to remain to recruit your health for a few weeks under the care of Martin, while I settle up my business and prepare to emigrate to America. In that vigorous young republic, my Alice, I shall find a new and extensive field for endeavor. There I have no doubt I shall so rise in my profession as to attain that eminence which I covet only for your dear sake. There we shall forget all the dark troubles that we have left behind us, and commence a new existence."

"Oh, Francis," she said, with her eyes fixed in unspeakable affection on his face, "how good, and brave, and noble you are; how much I owe you; my life, and all that makes life of any worth. When I was a poor, lost girl, forsaken by all my friends, persecuted to death by evil men, falling into a horrible pit of destruction without a hand on earth to help a creature so lost and ruined—you, noble soul, believed in my innocence—you stretched forth your hand—and, though all the world cried shame upon you, you snatched me from destruction, and drew me to the shelter of your own strong, noble heart. Oh, what can I render to you for all that you have done for me, my husband? All my love was yours before—all my life would not be enough. Oh, if I had my will, no one should ever wait on you but me—no hands should ever wash your feet but mine. Francis! Francis!" she cried, passionately, holding out her arms.

He bowed his head to her caress, and while she held it to her throbbing heart, she burst into a passion of sobs and tears.

"Compose yourself, dear love; you are my wife, my own; I was bound to rescue you or perish with you; I would have laid down my life for your liberty; and your love, dear Alice, is more than sufficient recompense for all."

"My love, my life, my soul, would not be enough, Francis! Francis!" she cried, passionately clasping him to her breast, and dwelling on his name as if its very sound had a charm for her.

"It is enough, my love; it is enough that you love me," he said. "And now, dear one, I have a favor to ask of you."

"A favor? What is there you would ask of me that would not be right?"

"It is for your own sake that I ask it, my darling—for

your own sake only. In a word, I wish you to keep very quiet to-day and to-morrow. Do not rise from your bed to ring your bell, and do not call aloud, or even speak above a whisper. Will you promise me this?"

"Certainly I will," said Alice, with a look of surprise, that she refrained from putting into words, but which he answered by saying:

"The slightest exertion at present would be very injurious to you, my love; it is as your physician, as well as your husband, that I request this forbearance on your part."

"I will obey you in both capacities," she said, in a subdued voice, adding, with a smile, the question, "Do I speak low enough?"

"Quite, my love, and this restraint will only be required of you for a few hours."

The remainder of the day passed in quiet and soothing conversation between them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Constant as the northern star,
Of whose true fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks,
They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
But there's but one in all doth hold its place.
So in the world—'tis furnished well with men,
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;
Yet in the number I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank,
Unshaked of emotion.—SHAKESPEARE.

The next day, at the appointed hour, the few devoted friends of Francis Heath and Alice assembled to pay what they supposed to be the last tribute of respect to the departed.

The hearse and the two carriages were drawn up before the house.

In the front room were assembled a small party, consisting of the old curate who had performed the marriage ceremony between Francis Heath and Alice Owen, the two old ladies who had witnessed the rites, Mrs. Mostyn, Mr. and Mrs. Wardour, and lastly, Dr. Heath and Mrs. Martin.

The coffin being already screwed down, there seemed to be no possibility of detecting the pious fraud that had rescued Alice from a living death, nevertheless the heart of Francis Heath stood still with intense anxiety during the progress of the funeral solemnities.

Once his conscience smote him for keeping the secret from one who had been his friend through all his trials—it was at the end of the service, and just before the coffin was to be carried out, when Constance Mostyn bent over

it, weeping abundant tears of sincere sympathy and regret. Willingly would he have dried those tears by telling Mrs. Mostyn that she for whom they were shed was living and at peace, but that he judged it better to be silent.

Constance remained at the house with the old housekeeper, while the funeral procession moved to the churchyard, and when the obsequies were quite over, and Dr. Heath returned, she was there to tender him a sister's sympathy and services.

Again Francis Heath felt a strong temptation to tell her the truth, but again prudence prevailed over impulse, and he thanked Mrs. Mostyn earnestly for all her kindness, and suffered her to depart unenlightened.

At last, then, once more he had the house to himself for the execution of his plans for the safety of Alice.

First, he went upstairs to speak to her from whom the solemn ceremonies of the day had kept him several hours absent.

He found her cheerful and very much restored.

"You have had some friends to see you downstairs. I heard people coming and going," she said, in the low tone that had been prescribed for her.

"Yes, dear Alice, it was a consultation; but you need not restrain yourself to speak in a low voice any longer. You are so well and strong now that you may speak as usual."

"I am very glad, for, to tell the truth, I found it more fatiguing to suppress my voice all the time than to speak naturally."

"Doubtless; and now, my dear Alice, I have to propose to you to get up and dress, and prepare yourself for a night journey."

"A night journey?" she said, in surprise.

"Yes, love; the reason is—that in our painful circum-

stances I do not wish to attract attention by driving through the town and along the highway in broad daylight."

She looked wistfully at him for a few moments, and then said:

"Francis, dear, let there be no secret between you and me; it costs you too much, beloved."

"Alice, Alice!" he interrupted, in a voice of entreaty, but she went on.

"Your stealthy and hurried manner; your ill-concealed agitation; your injunction upon me of silence or suppressed tones; this journey under the shadow of night, all point to a fact——"

"Alice, Alice, the hankering of a woman after forbidden knowledge first brought ruin and death unto the world——"

"I know it, but this is not forbidden knowledge, neither would I speak of it did I not already possess it, and did I not see how much pain it costs you to keep the supposed secret from me. Confess, then, that poor Alice has not been pardoned, but that her deliverer has effected her escape in some way. Is it not so?"

His silence seemed to admit the fact; and Alice, though she had suspected this, grew pale at the confirmation of her fears.

"And these people that were coming and going downstairs were here with a search-warrant to look for me?" she said, becoming deadly white.

"No, no, Alice, my poor fawn, you will never be hunted again. You are safe—safe, believe me."

"I am safe, since you say so, though I do not understand how that can be, since I am not pardoned," she said, in perplexity.

She knew so much, that he judged it best for her peace that she should know all. He therefore said:

"Alice, they will never concern themselves in any way about you again, unless you choose to present yourself before them. They believe you beyond all earthly laws. You fell into a cataleptic fit, which was supposed to be death. After some investigation and some delay and formalities, during which you lay as one dead, you were given up to my disposal. I brought you here, dear Alice, and was so happy as to recover you. That is the whole truth. You have only to keep out of sight for a few days, until I can arrange my business and get you off to America."

"And that subdued bustle downstairs—I guess what it was now!" said Alice, in a tone of deep awe.

"It was a pious fraud, my love, if ever there was such a thing."

"And we must set forth to-night to seek a place of concealment?"

"Yes, dear; the cottage in the mountains, of which I told you, where you will remain under the care of good Mrs. Martin, who is the only one besides ourselves that is in possession of the secret. You are strong enough for the drive?"

"Oh, yes! and I thank you so very much for telling me everything. I shall know how to govern myself now."

Francis Heath called Martin in to assist Alice to dress and to put up the few necessities that they required to take with them, while he himself went into the back yard to make his preparations.

In the coachhouse there was an old carriage, in tolerable repair, that had once been the property of Dr. Heath's predecessor, but that had been purchased with the other fixtures and movables appertaining to the premises. Dr. Heath's horses were in the stable.

Not daring in this emergency to take any one into his confidence, or even to call in the assistance of a laborer,

Francis Heath drew out the old coach, and put the horses to it. His next care was to pack into it a supply of food, wine, and candles, to last for several days. Having completed these arrangements, he went upstairs to see how Alice was progressing, and to wait the hour of setting forth.

At ten o'clock, therefore, when all the village was still, they had first a comfortable supper in the kitchen, and then Dr. Heath put out the fire and lights, locked up the house, took Alice out from the back door, where the old coach waited, placed her, well wrapped up, on the back seat, with a hot brick at her feet, put Martin in with her, mounted the box himself, drove out at the stable gate, and so commenced their night journey.

It was about eleven o'clock, and very dark, when the coach passed down the village and took the road leading to the rocky glen known as Horne's Hole.

At last the foot of the mountain was reached in safety. Francis Heath drove for some distance close under the ridge, until he reached a point where the mountain seemed cloven in two, the cleft forming a narrow wooded valley, at the furthest extremity of which was the cottage to which they were bound. As the mouth of this valley was thickly choked with a growth of evergreens, no carriage could by any means enter it. They were obliged, therefore, to draw up at its entrance and alight.

Francis Heath drew Alice's arm within his own, and led the way, while old Martin followed, laden with as many packets as she could carry. A walk of about one-eighth of a mile through the thicket brought them to the head of the valley, where, close against the junction of the mountains, and in about an acre of cleared ground, stood the solitary cottage in which they sought refuge for Alice. Nothing could be more lonely and desolate than the aspect of this dwelling, surrounded as it was on three

sides by inaccessible rocks, and approached on the fourth through a thick wood.

"Have you the key, Martin?" inquired Dr. Heath, when they had passed through the broken gate up the grass-grown garden-walk to the door of the cottage.

"Oh, yes, sir," said the old woman, producing a large, rusty key, that, being fitted to the lock, presently gave them admission to a small, narrow passage, having a room on each side.

Opening a door on the right, they entered a good-sized kitchen, plainly furnished, and with its furniture covered with the dust of many months.

Dr. Heath placed Alice in the settle beside the chimney, wrapped her carefully up, and, turning to his housekeeper, said:

"It is no time for ceremony, Martin, we must make a fire with the first thing we can find for the purpose." He proceeded to break up the old chair, the fragments of which he piled upon the hearth. Then taking from his pocket the necessary apparatus for the purpose, he struck a light and kindled a fire, that soon sent its cheerful light and warmth through the damp, deserted room.

"Now, Martin, my good woman, get things into a little order here, while I go back to the carriage to fetch the remainder of the packets," said Francis Heath, leaving the cottage.

He was gone about fifteen minutes, and when he returned, so well had the good woman employed the time, that the furniture was dusted, the cloth laid for breakfast, and the kettle hung over the fire.

When breakfast was over, and the table cleared away, Dr. Heath sat himself down beside Alice's armchair, and called Mrs. Martin to join them, as he wished to take her into their consultation.

When the fatigued housekeeper had gladly sunk into a seat on the other side of the doctor, the latter said:

"Now, my dear Alice, and my good Martin, I must hurry away as soon and as fast as I can, therefore I want you to attend to the directions I have to give you for your safety."

"Must you indeed go so soon, sir?" inquired Martin, while Alice looked pleadingly into his face, but said nothing.

"Yes, unfortunately, yes; I must go for many imperative reasons. In the first place—secluded and unfrequented as this pass is, I dare not leave my carriage at its entrance, lest some early passenger might chance to come this way, and see it."

"And, oh, dear! to think that there is no room to get it into the thicket and hide it," said Martin, with a groan.

"No; but when I return I will come on horseback, for I can bring a horse quite through the thicket, and put him into the shed behind the cottage. But there are other, and even more exigent reasons, why I must return at once. It is necessary that I should show myself at Gwyn as early as possible to-day, so that I shall not be missed and my absence commented upon. I must by every care, avoid attracting attention and inquiry. Why do you look so sad, sweet Alice? There is no danger, love; only a need of prudence for a while," said Francis Heath, affectionately, taking her hand.

"It is not that, dear Francis; it is not that. I am thinking of the care and trouble I am to you," she answered, with tears suffusing her dark eyes.

"Think not of that, love; it is care and trouble willingly undertaken; think not of it, it is only for a season; think of the comfort and happiness you will be to me for long

years after we shall have attained the refuge of another country."

And after tenderly embracing his wife, and shaking hands with Mrs. Martin, Dr. Heath left the cottage and took his way down the narrow glen.

CHAPTER XXX.

And she was lost, yet I breathed,
But not the breath of human life.—BYRON.

The forenoon was passed by Mrs. Martin in cleaning and putting into some order the small, neglected house. Alice pressed her own assistance upon the good woman, but Mrs. Martin pleaded her master's orders, and would not suffer her mistress to do aught but quietly rest in the armchair in the chimney corner, only leaving it to draw up to the table at noon to partake of the boiled partridge and glass of sherry that the careful housekeeper had got ready.

The afternoon was passed in completing the work of the morning.

After an early tea, Mrs. Martin carefully secured the doors and windows of the house, covered the kitchen fire, and attended Alice to the sleeping chamber that they were to occupy in company, where she assisted her mistress to undress and get to bed.

Lastly, she drew the curtains carefully around Alice, and leaving her to repose, betook herself to her own cot bedstead.

Exhausted by the great fatigue of the last two days and nights, Mrs. Martin fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, that lasted until late in the morning, and how much longer it would have continued is uncertain, for she was only at length awakened by a loud and prolonged knocking at the outer door, attended with a voice, calling:

"Martin, Martin! in the name of Heaven, woman, are you dead or in a trance-coma?"

"Coming, sir—coming immediately," answered Mrs. Martin, hurrying on her clothes, as she recognized the voice of her master.

"It is a world's wonder he had not waked up his wife," said Martin, glancing uneasily at the curtains of Alice's bed, from which no sound came. "If I slept fast, I know who sleeps faster," she added, as she hurried out into the passage, and unbarred and unlocked the front door to admit Francis Heath.

"Good Heaven, Martin, how late you sleep and how soundly. I have been rapping, and calling, and shaking at this door for the last half hour, I do really believe," said the doctor, impatiently.

"I was so very tired, quite worn out, sir, indeed," said the housekeeper, apologetically.

"I believe you, poor soul. You have had a fatiguing time of it," said the doctor, quite mollified. "How is your mistress?" he asked, dismounting, and passing into the kitchen.

"As well as possible, I think, sir. She sleeps sounder than I did, for even your loud knocking and calling did not awaken her," said Mrs. Martin, as she bustled about, opening the kitchen window-shutters, and then proceéding to light a fire on the hearth.

"Why, it is eleven o'clock," exclaimed the doctor. "I will go and see how my sleeping beauty fares," he added, mentally, as he passed out of the kitchen, and entered the chamber of his wife.

With a half-suppressed smile upon his lips, he approached the bed, and drew the curtains, to gaze upon her as she slept. The next instant, he started back in surprise and alarm.

The bed had been slept in, but was now empty.

He glanced around the room. There was not a crevice or an article of furniture that would for a moment have

hidden her from his view. He next observed with anxiety that the back door of the chamber was slightly ajar. He went to it immediately, and passed into the small back yard.

This yard was very circumscribed, inclosed in the front by the wall of the cottage, on the back by the frowning precipice, and on each side by two low stone fences. There was no outhouse, no place of concealment within it, no gate or door of egress from it.

"She is not there; but I am wrong to be anxious; nothing can have happened to her. She probably grew tired of lying still, and, not wishing to disturb Mrs. Martin, she arose early, and is doubtless in some part of the house," said Francis Heath to himself, as he hastily returned to the kitchen, where Martin was getting breakfast.

"Your mistress is up, she has been up some time, probably, but she is not in her room. Where can she possibly be?" he inquired of Mrs. Martin.

"My mistress up, and not in her chamber? Impossible, sir; for when I got up, nobody had left the room, for I found the door fastened securely on the inside, just as I left it when I went to bed."

"It was?" exclaimed Dr. Heath, his surprise and alarm growing every instant greater.

"Surely, yes, sir."

"And the back door?"

"I fastened it securely last night, sir."

"Did you open it this morning?"

"No, sir; I have not been near it this morning."

"And yet it was ajar! ajar, and your mistress nowhere visible! Good Heaven, woman, what is the meaning of this?" asked Dr. Heath, bending his brows sternly upon the housekeeper.

"It must be she's gone out, sir; but wherever she is,

she must be in her flannel dressing-gown, and so she cannot be far off."

Dr. Heath did not stay to hear the last words. He rushed frantically out into the back yard, in the desperate hope that he might have overlooked Alice in his first search. Then hurrying back, he seized his hat and rushed out at the front door to search the narrow, wooded vale.

Up and down through the thicket he hurried, calling wildly upon the name of Alice, and bitterly reproaching himself that he had left her for an hour. But no trace of the lost one could be found in the lonely glen.

After two hours spent in that distracted search, he went back to the cottage in the vain hope that she might have returned. He found Mrs. Martin presiding over the breakfast that she had kept warm for him.

"Have you found her, Master Francis?"

"Found her! no! Has she not returned?"

"Alack! no, sir!"

He threw himself into a chair, and groaned aloud. In truth this case of disappearance was one of unexampled difficulty and distress. In any ordinary case he could have called upon his friends and neighbors to assist him in his search, and he could have advertised in the public papers. But in this case, where the lost one was a fugitive in hiding for her life and liberty, he dared not call on any one to assist him in the quest, for if any other than himself should find her, she would then be worse than lost, worse than dead!

As these thoughts revolved through his mind, groan after groan burst from his bosom.

"Master Francis! Master Francis! for Heaven's sake don't do that! Come and have a morsel of something to keep up your strength," pleaded his housekeeper.

"What! and she abducted! arrested! or wandering somewhere in deadly peril!"

And with the impulse of wild regret and longing that drives the bereaved into the last haunts of the lost, Francis Heath started up and went into his wife's deserted chamber.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Yet now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
I would lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear,
Till death, like sleep, might steal on me
And I might feel in the warm air,
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea,
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

—SHELLEY.

When Francis Heath, in great trouble, passed into the apartment of his lost wife, he drew aside the curtains to throw himself upon the bed and give away to his passion of grief.

But the sight that met him there was such as might have called back his spirit had it been hovering on the confines of eternity.

For there lay Alice, sleeping as calmly, breathing as regularly, as though she had lain undisturbed since the night before. Indeed, it was difficult to look upon her calmly reposing form and face, and believe that she had left her bed at all. For a minute he stood, arrested by the unexpected and incomprehensible fact, in a sort of stupefaction of astonishment. But the spell was presently broken by the ecstatic joy he felt at her restoration, and, without waking her, he hurried into the kitchen, saying:

"Martin, she is found. Come here."

The housekeeper hastened at once to obey, and, full of wonder, followed him to the bedside, where he pointed to the sleeping form of Alice.

"The Lord save us!" was all that the astonished woman

found breath to utter as she gazed inquiringly into the face of her master.

"I know no more about how she came back than you do, Martin. I came in hither to throw myself upon the bed for a few minutes, and when I drew aside the curtains, she was lying here as you see her, fast asleep. We must wait until she wakes for an explanation of this riddle," said Dr. Heath, in answer to the wild, inquiring looks of his housekeeper.

"The Lord save us!" again ejaculated the housekeeper, who seemed incapable of varying the expression of her astonishment.

"But it is very strange that you know nothing about it, as I see by your face that you do not. It is inexplicable that you neither saw nor heard her return."

"Heaven bless us! It is like fairy work," said the woman.

"I shall sit by the bedside until she wakes, and you may bring me a cup of coffee here, Martin," said the doctor.

And the old servant hastened to obey the wishes of her master.

Dr. Heath watched long and patiently by the bedside of his wife, who continued to sleep serenely until late in the afternoon, when she quietly opened her eyes, and, seeing her husband, said:

"You here, Francis? Why, when did you arrive?"

"Early this morning, dear; and it is now nearly four in the afternoon."

She looked at him in astonishment, saying:

"Is it possible that I have so overslept myself? Why did you not awaken me?"

"Because no invalid should ever be awakened, dear; besides, you were disturbed in the night, or at least, you were up very early this morning, and out, which was very imprudent, and very extraordinary, after your promise to

me that you would not leave the house during my absence," said Dr. Heath, in a voice of gentle reproof.

She looked at him in utter amazement, repeating:

"I disturbed in the night? I up and out early this morning? Why, I have not even stirred since I lay down here last night. I was so fatigued, I slept so soundly that I did not even dream!"

"On the contrary, my dear Alice, Martin knows that when she arose this morning you were not in your bed, nor in your room, nor in the house, nor on the premises, and that the back door, which she had carefully fastened last night, was open. Now, what am I to think of that?" inquired her husband, in a vexation of spirit that might have been deep displeasure had not the misfortunes of Alice made him exceedingly tender toward her.

"On my soul, as I hope for salvation, I have never once waked up until now; and as for getting up and leaving the house, oh, Francis, do you think I would so disobey you? Or do you think that I would tell you an untruth?" said poor Alice, with her eyes full of tears.

"There, do not weep, love. It is some mistake for which you are not to blame, and which time can only explain. For the rest, I cannot be too much rejoiced only to have you restored to me," said Francis Heath, kissing her tenderly, before he went into the kitchen to speak to the housekeeper.

During the doctor's absence, all through the next day, Mrs. Martin took care not to lose sight of her mistress.

At nightfall the doctor returned, and was rejoiced to find his wife well and cheerful; and after an early supper, as he was very much fatigued, they retired.

Having lost his rest for several preceding nights, the doctor only waited till he saw Alice in a healthful slumber, and then gave himself up to repose. He was soon buried in a profound and dreamless sleep, such a sleep

as a strong man enjoys, after many nights and days of watching, and of harassing fatigue and anxiety. He slept like the dead until near morning, when an ill dream, a heavy sense of impending danger, and a strange, nervous shock, aroused him. He started up in bed, but so deep had been his sleep, so strange his forgotten dream, and so severe the unknown shock which aroused him, that he could not at once recollect where he was.

The old clock in the passage was striking three. Suddenly he remembered time, place, and circumstances; and at the same moment he missed Alice from his side!

To spring out of bed, strike a light, and search the room, was but the work of a minute.

But Alice was nowhere to be seen.

He flew to the back door leading into the yard. The door was unfastened and slightly ajar. He hurried into the small circumscribed yard, and eagerly searched, but no trace of Alice could be found. Neither was there any egress from this yard by which she might have passed out.

Half distracted with anxiety, he rushed back into the house, and into the kitchen, where Martin had made up her bed, and called:

"Martin! Martin!"

"Yes, sir! What is the matter?"

"Dress quickly, and come out! Your mistress is gone!"

"Gone again! The Lord have a care of us! We're bewitched!" exclaimed the old woman, jumping up, hurrying on her clothes, and coming forth.

The most anxious search commenced throughout the house, but without success.

"She escaped through the back door of this chamber, and into that yard; and there she seems to have vanished like a spirit, for there is no egress for her bodily form!" said the doctor, in amazement and distress, pointing to

the little yard, inclosed as it was with high walls on three sides, and the inaccessible precipice on the fourth.

"I can't say anything about it, sir; I feel as if I was going crazy!" said the housekeeper, desperately.

"Martin, I wish you to remain in this room and watch that back door, while I search for her through the valley," said the doctor, placing a candle in a glass lantern, and leaving the cottage for the purpose.

Martin remained in the mysterious chamber, shivering with cold and fear, and muttering:

"I wish he had not left me here by myself. She's 'no canny,' as the Scotch say. She's been dead once, and well-nigh buried, as I begin to think she ought to have been, for she can't be like other flesh and blood, a-vanishing in this way. She may be her own ghost for aught I know! I'm fear'd of her, with her appearings and disappearings. Oh, Lord, save and protect me!" she cried, shaking with terror, as Alice, like a spirit, indeed, with her pale face, streaming black hair, and flowing white garments, glided across the room and vanished within the curtains.

The terror-stricken woman had no power to approach the bed or look upon her unearthly mistress. She remained cowering in her seat, and muttering prayers to herself, until she heard the welcome sounds of her master's footsteps approaching. This circumstance gave her so much courage, that when Dr. Heath entered the chamber inquiring, in a hopeless tone of voice:

"Has Alice returned?"

She was enabled to point to the bed and answer:

"Yes, sir."

"When and how?" inquired the doctor, approaching the bed and looking upon the face of his wife, who was quietly sleeping.

"As I am a living sinner, she suddenly appeared in the center of the room, and seemed to float toward the bed,

where she disappeared without saying a word," replied the housekeeper, whose greatly excited imagination unconsciously exagerated the truth.

Dr. Heath sat down beside the bed, and while watching the slumbers of his wife, fell into profound thought. There was but one rational solution to all this mystery, and that solution filled him with the greatest anxiety. How to meet the dangers that it inevitably involved he could not yet discover. While he sat revolving these perplexing thoughts in his mind, Alice awoke naturally and spoke:

"Up so early, dear Francis?"

"Yes, Alice; you know that I must visit my patients early this morning; but I will return the sooner to-night," said the doctor, avoiding all allusion to her second disappearance, of which she was evidently unconscious.

"Then I will get up and breakfast with you first, for I feel quite well this morning," said Alice, cheerfully.

Dr. Heath assented, and went into the kitchen to caution Martin against mentioning the strange event of the night to her mistress. After breakfast he departed, consigning Alice to the strictest vigilance of her aged attendant.

This day passed as the preceding one. The manner of Alice was so natural—she ate and drank, read and sewed so much like other women of flesh and blood—that the superstititous terrors of the aged housekeeper were gradually dispelled.

Earlier than usual in the evening Dr. Heath returned, bringing, in a portmanteau, a few changes of raiment to his wife, and in his pocket a humorous book, with which he destined to amuse her that evening by reading aloud.

When they retired to their chamber, he took care, after bolting and locking the doors, to withdraw the keys and place them under his pillow, so that Alice could not again

escape from the room. And he further resolved to lie awake and watch Alice during the night. This was not difficult, as curiosity and anxiety left him little inclination to slumber. Feigning sleep, therefore, he lay still and vigilant. Alice was soon fast asleep; he heard her breathing slowly and regularly while he lay and watched. Interminably long seemed every hour. He heard the clock strike ten, and then eleven. Longer than this, however, his patience was not doomed to be tried. As the last stroke of eleven died away, he felt Alice move cautiously, and saw her rise slowly in a sitting posture, murmuring:

"He must confess! He must confess! It is of no consequence that poor Alice Owen should suffer dishonor; but the wife of Francis Heath must not, shall not, rest under it! He must confess! I—I will compel him to do so!"

And, throwing the cover off, she slowly arose and stood up. Knowing the danger of awakening a sleepwalker, as he now knew her to be, Dr. Heath slowly arose and followed her. Noiselessly she glided around to the other side of the bed, slipped her hand under the pillow, withdrew the keys he had placed there, selected one, and glided toward the back door, unlocked it and passed out, Dr. Heath keeping close behind her with the shaded lamp that he had seized on passing the mantelpiece.

He followed her straight across the yard toward the precipice at the back. There, pushing aside the crowded evergreens that closed up the chasm in the rock, she entered what seemed at first a hidden ravine.

Alice went slowly on and on, gliding up and down, right and left, as the irregularities of the narrow passage demanded. The secret of her disappearance was now revealed; she had always in leaving the yard vanished into this secret subterranean passage; but whither was she bound, and for what purpose?

Still she went on and on, now rising, now sinking; now passing to one side, now to another; and now stooping as the projecting or overhanging rocks compelled her. The anxiety of Dr. Heath was almost insupportable. Nothing but the extreme danger of awakening the sleepwalker there and then prevented him from stopping her. In following her closely he chose the less of two evils.

Added to this consideration was a strong curiosity and interest in knowing whither this fearful nightwalk through the interior of the mountain tended, and what could be the motive of the walker.

So, keeping as close as possible to Alice, and guarding his lamp carefully, Dr. Heath followed her, as she slowly wound up and down, right and left—now climbing, now stooping, through this terrible subterranean passage. At length, after nearly an hour of this toilsome progress, the scene suddenly expanded. They had not, however, come out into the open air; that Dr. Heath knew as well from the warmth and closeness of the atmosphere as from the absence of any view of the sky.

He turned his lantern around, and discovered to his great astonishment that they were within the foundation vaults or cellars of some large house. Stone walls and shadowy arches were all around them.

He had no time for wonder or speculation, for Alice, like a spirit, glided on before him.

He followed her through several arched compartments of the cellar to the foot of a flight of steep stairs that she began to ascend. He went after her up these stairs to their landing in a narrow passage, in which hung several dark cloaks, indicating that the house was inhabited, though the family seemed at this hour buried in deep repose.

The feelings of Dr. Heath on finding himself here were complicated and painful.

He had secretly entered a strange house in the dead of the night like any burglar. What it some member of the family, awakening, should discover him and shoot him as a housebreaker before he should have time to make himself known or to explain his presence? And even if no one was awakened, and he went on in safety, whither did this walk tend? What would be the end of this strange adventure? He had no time for further reflections, for Alice had approached the back staircase of the mansion leading from this to the upper chambers. He followed her as, like a spirit, slowly and silently she glided up these stairs, to a second landing in a back passage.

Still gliding on before him, she wound through several intricate turnings, until, at the end of a short, narrow passage, she reached the door of a chamber, where, for the first time, she paused as if spellbound. Dr. Heath was at her side, waiting in the extremity of anxiety. Just then the clock began to strike the hour of midnight.

As the last stroke of twelve died away, Alice slowly pushed open the door, revealing a lighted chamber, in which were two persons, whose pale faces and fixed eyes seemed to speak a panic of astonishment.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
Nor peace within, nor calm around,
Nor that content, surpassing wealth,
The sage in meditation found,
And walked with inward glory crowned!
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure—
Others I see whom these surround—
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.

—SHELLEY.

In the world outside the narrow valley of Horne's Hole the fate of Alice Heath had been forgotten, save by the few devoted friends who had been faithful to her in her days of bitter distress and by the conscience-stricken man who had presented her to destruction; and other exciting events soon drove the memory of the lost girl, for a time, even from their minds.

First, Mr. Maraudey was, by a writ of *habeas corpus*, brought into court, to have the reason of his detention in prison reinvestigated.

His friends came forward in force, both with money and counsel. His case was argued *pro* and *con* for more than a week, and created quite as great an excitement in its own way as had the two remarkable criminal trials immediately preceding it.

But on the ninth day, the judgment of the court was pronounced, discharging him from custody.

Colonel North and other gentlemen of the county gave dinners in his honor.

Dr. Horne, alone, of all the inhabitants of the neighborhood, paid no sort of attention to the lion of the day.

And, in fact, every person admitted that, both upon account of his wife's recent death and his own serious indisposition, Dr. Horne might well be excused from either giving entertainments or even participating in those given by others.

The same pretext seemed to enfranchise the doctor from all other liabilities; for when, a few days after the mock funeral, Francis Heath called at Radnor, for perhaps the tenth time, to demand satisfaction of its master for the persecution of that poor, martyred girl, he was told that the doctor was confined to his bed by illness, and could not be seen.

In this one respect Dr. Horne had not "shammed." He was indubitably ill both in mind and body. From the time of the funeral of Alice Heath his health and spirits had utterly failed.

He neglected his profession, lost much of his practice, confined himself closely to his house, and seemed fast falling into a state of confirmed hypochondria. Various were the causes assigned by the community for his deplorable condition. Some ascribed it to extreme grief for the loss of his wife—others did not scruple to attribute it to remorse for the fatal prosecution of poor Alice Heath. As time passed the health and spirits of the morose hypochondriac grew worse and worse. His profession was utterly neglected; his practice entirely lost. His time was passed in wandering through the solitary woods and among the gloomy mountain gorges around his dreary dwelling, or else brooding in his chamber.

And from that lone mansion strange rumors reached the surrounding neighborhood. Old family domestics whispered of fearful sights and sounds seen and heard about that house. Some bolder than the rest hinted that the spirit of Alice Heath haunted the dwelling of her destroyer. Others went further still, and said that if

any one should listen at his chamber door, their morose master might be heard in the middle of the night pleading with the spirit of the martyred girl.

For some time these rumors were regarded as the romances of the servants. But at length more serious attention was given to the subject, when, one day, as Mr. Osborne was riding to Horne's Hole, to make a call upon old Mr. Hayhurst, the overseer, he was met in the depths of the forest by Dr. Horne, who was walking along and gazing wildly around. Laying his almost skeleton hand upon the bridle, he looked into the face of the rider, and asked:

"Parson, do you believe the dead can walk?"

The pastor paused in astonishment for a moment, and then answered, somewhat sternly:

"No; at least I never saw them doing so, though fools, frightened at their own shadows, and villains pursued by remorse, fancy that they do. Why do you ask me?" questioned Mr. Osborne, in astonishment.

"Because she does."

"Who?" again inquired the clergyman, in consternation.

"She—the dead woman!"

"Your wife do you mean?" asked Mr. Osborne, in a sort of horror.

"Hush! No, the other one!"

"Alice?"

"Hush, I say!—yes—she comes every night. Do you believe it?"

"I believe that you are very ill, and require medical treatment," replied the deeply-shocked pastor, gazing with pain upon the cadaverous complexion and fierce eyes of the other speaker.

"'Ill?'—hum; 'ill' has two meanings—ill, sick; and ill,

sinful. Now, do you mean to say that I am very sick, or very sinful?" asked the doctor, with a sardonic smile.

"Both, perhaps; and in either case you need a physician—of the soul or of the body—perhaps of both, as I said," replied the clergyman, gravely.

"A physician!—where shall I get one? Heath and myself are the only physicians in this neighborhood. This physician," he said, clapping his hand upon his breast, "this physician cannot heal himself. And as for Heath, he had rather kill than cure me! 'Ill,' indeed! 'physician,' forsooth. Good-day, physician of the soul!"

And so saying, the lunatic—for lunatic Mr. Osborne had now no doubt that he was—turned, and disappeared in the woods.

The clergyman, in sorrow and amazement, went on his way to the old house at Horne's Hole, which was occupied by Mr. Hayhurst.

On arriving, he was at once shown into the sitting-room, where he found the old man alone, and suffering from rheumatism.

"I am sorry to find you so unwell, Mr. Hayhurst," said the pastor, after the first salutation had passed, and he had taken his seat.

"Yes, sir, and I am sorry to be so. It is not, however, because I am sick that I sent for you, Mr. Osborne; but to consult you about the case of my employer."

"Dr. Horne?"

"Of course, sir; I think it is time he was looked to."

"What ails him?"

"It is more than I can tell, sir; but I doubt that he is losing his mind. You might have met him as you rode along, for he has just left here."

"I did meet him."

"And did he tell you——" said Hayhurst, suddenly pausing, and looking intently into the eyes of his visitor.

"He told me of some hallucinations that trouble his rest," replied the clergyman, gravely.

"And what do you make of them, sir?" inquired the farmer, anxiously.

"That he is partially deranged," answered Mr. Osborne.

"Well, sir, I fear you are right; it is a satisfaction to have my own opinion confirmed. He has been here several times, proposing to me to go home with him, and watch with him in his chamber through the night. What would you advise me, under the circumstances, to do?"

"Assuredly, Mr. Hayhurst, I should earnestly counsel you to do as he requests. Now, I think it your imperative duty to do so."

"I am willing to follow your instructions, sir; though I cannot now see what I can do."

"Why, this—by watching with him through the hours during which he fancies he sees the apparition, you can better observe the character and symptoms of the fit of frenzy that must come upon him, and you will be prepared to give some report of his case before the proper authorities."

"And for what purpose, sir? I don't understand."

"Why, for this purpose, certainly. If he is insane, then for his own safety and well-being, as much as for that of all around him, he should be placed under restraint and medical treatment. To have this effected, it is necessary that his condition should be proved by a competent witness. Now, the farm servants by whom he is surrounded are not capable of understanding his case—hence the necessity of some competent person passing time enough with him to be able to testify to his state. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes, sir; but it seems treacherous to go to his house

for any such secret purpose!" said the farmer, with a dubious expression of countenance.

"Treacherous? Why should it be? Not at all! Would you have the poor, solitary sufferer grow worse for want of proper medical attendance? Or, supposing him insane, would you have him left at large to do himself or some other person a fatal injury?" inquired Mr. Osborne, with surprise.

"Oh, no, sir, by no means; and looking at it in your light, it may possibly be right that I should go and do as you advise me," replied the farmer, who after some further and unimportant debate and hesitation, yielded to the force of the clergyman's arguments, and promised to follow his directions.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Avaunt and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless! thy blood is cold!
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.—SHAKESPEARE.

It was two days after this occurrence, one dark and dismal evening, when the rain came on in fitful gusts, the wind wailed in rising and falling sobs, the lightning flashed at long intervals, and the thunder muttered sullenly—an evening having all the gloom without the glory of storm—that the pastor sat alone in his study, engaged in writing his sermon for the next Sabbath morning, when there came a low rap at the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Osborne, without lifting his eyes from his work.

The door opened and some one entered.

And Mr. Osborne looked up to behold, with surprise, Mr. Hayhurst, the steward, who stood before him with an aspect so pale, frightened and woe-begone that the worthy clergyman threw down the pen, started up and seized his hand, and gazing on him, exclaimed:

"Why, Hayhurst, my friend, what is the matter?"

"I do not know, sir, unless it is that I am going mad as fast as Dr. Horne."

"Why—what mean you, then?"

"I watched with him last night."

"You did? And the result? Tell me all about it. But first of all—here, take this chair," said the clergyman, indicating one that stood beside his own seat.

Mr. Hayhurst drew near, and dropped rather than seated himself in it.

"And now?" asked the pastor, eagerly.

"I watched with him last night, as I told you, sir. He laid down in his clothes on the outside of the bed. I sat in an easy chair beside him. I could not persuade him to undress and get between the sheets; no, he said he could not until she had come and gone. We conversed but little, and that was in the early portion of the night.

"As the hours crept slowly by, the fire on the hearth, for want of replenishing, sank low; the little taper, in need of trimming, burned dimly; my companion lapsed into silence, and my own spirits fell to zero. I heard the clock striken ten; then, after a long, dull, tedious interval, eleven; then, perhaps, I dozed, for I did not hear it strike twelve, although it was just at that hour that I was horribly startled by hearing a long, low, wailing cry from the mouth of the man on the bed.

"Looking up, I saw Dr. Horne sitting on the bed, his face pale as death, his brow bathed in perspiration, his eyes strained out upon some object, to which his long arm and skeleton finger pointed.

"Following instantly the direction of his gaze and his finger, to my horror and amazement, I saw, as plainly as I see you now—will you believe me? shall I tell you?—the apparition of Alice Heath standing within the doorway. The image was clothed, not in the habiliments of the grave, but in the usual white dress worn in life; her pale face was cadaverous as that of an exhumed corpse; her wild, black locks straggled in disorder down upon her breast; her eyes were wide open, steady, frozen; her hand was raised to Heaven with an adjuring gesture.

"But my horror and amazement never reached its height until those stony eyes fixed themselves upon the face of Dr. Horne, and, with her hand still raised to Heaven, her frozen lips parted with one thrilling word:

"'Confess!'

"At that word Dr. Horne sank back into a swoon, and the vision vanished."

Here Hayhurst paused, while Mr. Osborne gazed at him in silent astonishment, not unmixed with suspicion and indignation, as a man might gaze upon a person who should dare to put his credulity to the severest test. Then speaking slowly, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the face of his visitor, he said:

"You saw the apparition of Alice Heath standing within the door of Dr. Horne's chamber last night at twelve o'clock?"

"By all my hopes of heaven, I did!" returned the other, without withdrawing his gaze.

"Man—man—you fell asleep and dreamed the whole thing."

"Then Dr. Horne and myself dreamed the same dream at precisely the same hour!"

"You are mad!"

"That may well be. But if I am sane, as sure as I stand here before you, as sure as I speak in your presence, and am heard in heaven, I saw the form that I have described to you last night at twelve o'clock, in the doorway of Dr. Horne's chamber," replied the visitor, with deep solemnity.

"And, after the swoon of Dr. Horne and the disappearance of the vision, what happened!"

"Why, as soon as I recovered the use of my limbs, and collected my scattered faculties, I went to the bedside, and sought to restore my friend to consciousness, not only for his own sake, but for mine, for it was terrible to be alone under such circumstances. But his swoon proved to be an obstinate one, and so, after working over him for some time in vain, I roused up the house servants."

"And what construction did their plain, good sense put upon this affair?"

"They seemed more frightened than surprised. John, the doctor's valet, who had been accustomed to sleep in his master's room, told me, with chattering teeth, that this event happened every night."

"What event—his master's fit?"

"The vision of Alice and the deathly swoon of Dr. Horne; and when, by our united efforts, we called the doctor to his senses, with great mental distress he confirmed his servant's words."

Mr. Osborne shook his head slowly, and with an air of incredulity.

"You do not believe it!" exclaimed his visitor, with a look of pain.

"My friend," said Mr. Osborne, solemnly, "I have no doubt that you believe all that you tell me. I am convinced that you act and speak in perfect good faith; but, in a case where I should distrust the fidelity of my own senses, you must forgive me if I cannot credit those of others."

"Well, Mr. Osborne," said the farmer, with an humbled look, "I did not, Heaven knows, come out this stormy evening only to astonish you with a marvelous and incredible story. I came to seek your aid and counsel for a sorely afflicted man, for whether you believe it or not, this prodigy occurs nightly, and is driving him mad!"

"Good neighbor, do not be angry with me. Certainly there is no need that I should assure you of my perfect faith in your truthfulness. But this of which you tell me is a case in which, as I said, I should doubt the evidence of my own eyes and ears. Such a prodigy, could such really possibly exist, should be witnessed, not by one man, or even by two, but by many at one and the same time, that each might have the witness of others, and that all might feel sure that no deception had been practiced.

"As for Dr. Horne, he has behaved exceedingly ill in persecuting to death a young and probably innocent girl. I do not like the man; still it is our bounden duty, both for his sake and for the well-being of others, to do what we can to ascertain his real condition, with a view to his relief."

"That was my only motive, sir, for troubling you at all."

"Well, Mr. Hayhurst, for the present do not mention this to any one. I will speak confidentially to Colonel North, who is a magistrate, and we will consult as to the best course to be pursued," said the clergyman, with something of the air of dismissing his visitor.

The farmer so understood his manner, and arose to depart, saying:

"Well, sir, I will leave it to you, of course. Good-night, sir."

"It should not be good-night, Hayhurst, if I were at leisure; but look at this manuscript. I have a night's work before me, and cannot help it; but see here, Hayhurst, not a word below stairs of the vision!" said Mr. Osborne, solemnly.

"Oh, no, sir, no; and, indeed, I can only look in the kitchen and say 'How d'ye do' and 'Good-by' before going." And with a cordial shake of the hands, the two parted.

But the story that Mr. Osborne was so anxious to keep concealed got wind without the agency of Mr. Hayhurst. Dr. Horne, like a perturbed spirit, wandered over the neighborhood, both by day and night. And if, in his disturbed mood, he chanced to meet an acquaintance, he would be sure to stop and tell them of the awful spectre that visited his room at midnight. The house servants at Radnor also now spoke freely of those nightly prodigies. As the days passed, and that fixed upon for the

execution of Gerald Mostyn drew near, it was observed that Dr. Horne's symptoms of mania became greatly aggravated.

It was about the middle of the week that Mr. Osborne at length went over to Llyndell and requested an interview with Colonel North.

Being shown into the library, where the colonel sat alone, the clergyman closed the door and took a seat, and then and there repeated to the magistrate all that he had been told of the reputed prodigies at Radnor.

The old gentleman listened with grave attention, and at the close of the story, said:

"I have for some time past regarded Dr. Horne as a subject of lunacy. I had heard the report to which you allude, but thought that the reputed 'vision' existed only in the diseased brain of a madman, and that what the master imagined, the servants believed. Now, however, when you tell me that Farmer Hayhurst, an honest, truthful and practical man, believes that he also witnessed this prodigy, I have only to say that the whole thing is probably a piece of jugglery, got up by some enemy of Horne for the torture of the poor, solitary hypochondriac, and into which it is our duty to investigate. I propose, therefore, that you, myself, and Mr. Hayhurst, as the three most interested, proceed to the house and watch through the night in his chamber. If this can be effected with perfect secrecy, so much the more likely shall we be to unmask the imposture. What think you of this plan?"

"It has my entire approbation. It is just what I myself should have proposed," said Mr. Osborne.

"We shall need the intervention of Mr. Hayhurst to obtain, if possible, the consent of Dr. Horne to our watching with him. Will you attend to that part of the business?" asked the colonel.

"With pleasure," answered the clergyman; "nor do I

anticipate the least difficulty in obtaining Dr. Horne's ready concurrence to our plan. He seems rather anxious than otherwise for aid and comfort. All that we must guard against is wounding the self-love of the lunatic by appearing to make light of this illusion or imposture, as the case may be. I believe our interview is at an end now, sir?"

"Not if you will favor me with your company for the evening."

"Impossible. I must see Hayhurst this afternoon, to make the requisite arrangements with him."

"Then when shall I see you again on the subject?"

"Some time in the course of to-morrow," replied the pastor, grasping and cordially shaking the hand of his old parishioner. And they parted.

The same day, according to agreement, Mr. Osborne sought Farmer Hayhurst, and opened to him the plan for investigating the mystery at Radnor. He found the way clearer than he could have anticipated.

"Sir," said the old man, "the time has arrived when the interference of friends and neighbors is imperatively necessary. Dr. Horne is no longer able to direct his own life. Since the final decision of the Minister in regard to Mr. Mostyn has been promulgated—since it is known beyond a doubt that there will be no second respite, and that the condemned man must suffer the extreme penalty of the law on Monday—Dr. Horne has passed every hour in alternate raving and stupor. He calls himself a murderer—a double, treble murderer. Sir, Heaven forgive us all! but I sometimes fear there may be more than mere mania in his raving."

"Strange—strange and terrible. We may be able to see, perhaps, the meaning of all this. Have you watched with him since that fatal night?"

"No, sir. Nor would I do it again alone for a mint of

money. I will, however, very gladly join others in the duty."

"Do you think that there will be any difficulty in getting the doctor's consent to our doing so?"

"I repeat, sir, that the doctor is not in a condition to be consulted. I will go over, as usual, in the afternoon of Friday, and remain there until you and your party arrive; and I will hold myself responsible for your being quietly installed in the chamber of the patient. Will that answer your purpose?"

"Perfectly, if you can really effect it."

"Certainly, I can and will. I hold myself bound to do it."

"Friday evening, then, let it be."

"Yes, sir."

"Good-by until then."

"Good-by, sir."

And the friends separated, until they should meet the next night in the haunted chamber of the monomaniac.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Oh, tell me, father, can the dead
  Walk on the earth, and look on us,
And lay upon the living's head
  Their blessings or their curse?
She comes to me each night;
  The dried leaves do not feel her tread;
She stands by me, in the deep midnight,
  In the white robes of the dead.—WHITTIER.

The morning of the day upon which the committee of neighbors was to visit Radnor and test the condition of the invalid there, Colonel North sat in his study buried in deep thought.

The old gentleman was not, through all his nature, the relentless judge which some of his acts might lead us to suppose. Proud conservator of rank he certainly was, and, as such, he had repulsed the pretensions of the penniless young lawyer, Gerald Mostyn, to an alliance with his family. Stern denouncer of guilt he had shown himself to be upon the occasion of Mr. Mostyn's conviction.

But if once a suspicion that he had acted with injustice toward a persecuted man insinuated itself into his mind, Colonel North was not one to shun the investigation of the truth. Such a doubt now possessed his thoughts. Many little incidents connected with the history of Dr. Horne—incidents which, taken singly, were of little moment, but, when combined, proved of great weight—now arranged themselves into a chain of probabilities, which raised in his mind grave suspicions of the doctor's integrity, and startling doubts of the condemned prisoner's guilt—and these doubts and suspicions once inspired, were necessarily acted upon.

Colonel North arose and rang the bell and ordered his horse to be saddled and brought to the door.

Then he hastily donned his riding-coat and hat, went out, mounted his steed, and rode rapidly on toward Gwyn, where Lord Starr was at that time tarrying. Two hours of hard riding through the mountain passes and across the wooded plains brought him to the town.

He dismounted at the principal entrance of the hotel, went in, and inquired if Lord Starr was still in the house.

Being answered in the affirmative, he asked for a private parlor, and sent a note to his lordship, requesting the favor of an interview.

A few minutes afterward the minister entered.

They met—they always met—as the best friends. Their political, religious, and social relations were all of the most harmonious nature. They shook hands cordially, and sat down. After the usual compliments of the morning, Colonel North opened the business of the interview by saying, with a grave smile:

"Your lordship has doubtless been sufficiently annoyed with the subject of Gerald Mostyn not to desire that topic renewed?"

The minister replied by nodding and looking inquisitive.

"Nor should I have troubled you to-day," the visitor proceeded to say, "had not serious doubts as to the criminality of that man been forced upon my mind."

Lord Starr looked surprised and disturbed, without, however, relaxing his inquisitive expression.

"Do not be alarmed, my friend; I have not come hither to petition for the further respite, which I understand has been finally refused."

"Yes, it has been," interrupted Lord Starr.

"Very true; so I comprehended, without the slightest intention to seek to change your purpose; but that which

I am about to request of your lordship you may possibly consider a still more improper favor," said Colonel North, with some hesitation.

"Speak on, old friend, I beg you; you surely know that there is nothing in which I could serve you that should not be promptly attended to," said Lord Starr, cordially.

"I thank you, sir. To my request, then. But first—your lordship has doubtless heard of the strange illness of my neighbor, Dr. Horne?"

"Certainly."

"And of the still stranger rumor connected with his illness?"

"Yes," said the minister, with a puzzled look.

"Very well. To-night a committee of neighbors will assemble at his house and in his sick chamber, with a view to ascertain the nature and extent of his malady—as to whether and in what degree he may be remorseful or deranged."

"Yes?" inquired the minister, with a look of interest.

"Well, I have an experiment to try. And I do entreat your lordship to believe that it is not impulsively, or without mature consideration that I make the request which I am about to prefer, and which I fear you, sir, may consider as improper as it is unusual," said Colonel North, earnestly.

"Well, well, old friend, there need not be, to a request from you to me, so very much of preface and introduction. I feel sure that you could not make an improper one, and as for the rest, if it be in my power to grant it, I will do so, however unusual it may be!" said Lord Starr, heartily.

"Then, my lord, my petition is that your lordship will accompany the Rev. Mr. Osborne, myself, and others to Radnor, and watch with us in the sick chamber of Dr.

Horne, where I think some light may be thrown upon the guilt or innocence of young Mostyn," said the colonel.

"That is indeed an unprecedented request!" replied the minister.

"It is drawn out by unprecedented exigency, sir."

"But on Monday, between nine and twelve, the man is to die."

"I know it; but there will be time enough to save him."

"This is a most extraordinary demand!" again exclaimed his lordship.

"I repeat that it is forced upon me by extraordinary necessity."

"And that necessity?"

"Will explain itself. At least, so I hope and believe. I beg that your lordship will grant my petition and await the result."

"The interest you take in this young man is altogether a new one, Colonel North," said the minister.

"The interest that I take is not in Gerald Mostyn, but in the cause of justice," replied the old gentleman.

Lord Starr looked down and mused for a few moments; then raising his head, he exclaimed:

"Well, I see nothing to prevent me making one of the committee; I will meet you there."

* * * * * * * *

That same afternoon Gerald Mostyn and his devoted wife were alone together in his prison cell. They sat side by side upon the edge of the bedstead, with a little stand between them, upon which lay an open volume. They were engaged, as they had been for many days previous, in reading the Scripture, and in prayer.

The long pressure of an almost insupportable weight of sorrow had so benumbed their faculties that now, indeed, they were scarcely conscious of the awfulness of their position. With what power of feeling paralyzing grief

had left her, Constance seemed to hope even "against hope." And blending with this feeling was a strange, but not unnatural desire—a desire that may not be understood by the happy, but will be easily comprehended by the miserable—it was, that all this troubled life were once well over, and the peace of the grave attained.

On Monday he must die; she should surely follow him; and then, by the grace of Heaven, would come rest —eternal rest; it was all that they had to hope for; but was it not enough?

* * * * * * * *

The shadows of night gathered darkly over the face of the earth. Black clouds that had been mustering all the evening hung heavily upon the mountain's brow. All outward signs presaged an awful tempest.

In the gloomy mansion of Radnor, in a remote and darkened chamber, the remorseful master of the house lay writhing under the terrors of a guilty conscience.

He was attended by one awe-stricken old servant, whose superstitious fears struggled with his habits of fidelity, and tempted him to escape from the haunted chamber. Yes, haunted!—if not by the spectre of a murdered maiden, at least by guilty memories and remorseful terrors, most horrible to witness. But as often as poor John would creep to the door, his master, dreading to be left alone for a moment, commanded him to come back.

As John for the twentieth time returned to his station by the bedside, the blast passed over the house, echoed sullenly from the mountain caverns, and rolled away in the distance.

"What—what was that?" cried the guilty man, with suspended breath.

"Lord bless you, master; it is nothing but the wind," replied John.

"Wind? No; it was a voice—her voice! Listen!"

again said the sufferer, starting up in bed, and bending forward toward the window on his right side, in an agony of attention.

"Bless you and save you, master, whose voice?" exclaimed the frightened servant.

"Hers! hers! hers—and it calls for vengeance!"

"May the Lord help you, master; say your prayers, and try to compose your mind. It was not a voice—it was the rain and wind."

"I tell you that her perturbed spirit rides the storm, and speaks in the wind."

"Dear master, there is no troubled spirit except your own! Do, master, try to compose yourself, and say your prayers."

At this moment a louder blast sounded through the mountain gorges, and the guilty man shrieked out:

"Close the shutters. Close them fast. She shall not enter here."

"She don't want to come, master. Lord deliver us, she don't want to come!" gasped the old man, shuddering, nevertheless, as he hurried to the windows—which were on the right side of the bed—and pulled in and secured the strong oaken shutters. Then he let fall the heavy moreen curtains, and having thus deadened the noise of the storm without, he returned to the side of his master.

The chamber was now quite dark, save for the low and smoldering wood fire on the hearth, whose fitful flames flashed out a lurid light, and cast up weird leaping shadows on the walls and ceiling, projecting them in spasmodic starts over the bed of the sick man, who again sprang up, exclaiming:

"Mercy, mercy! The room is full of demons. Wretch—did you mean to drive me mad! Light the lamps to drive them away."

"Master, master!" cried the old servant, in extreme distress, "do, pray, be reasonable."

"Light the lamps, you villain!" screamed his master.

The terrified servant hastened to obey by applying a match to each of the old-fashioned lamps that garnished the ends of the mantelpiece, on the left side of the bed.

The lights falling across the figure of the sick man revealed a face ghastly in its pallor, haggard in its emaciation, horrible in its expression. His senses seemed preternaturally acute, for though the thick, oaken shutters, and heavy moreen curtains shut out all sound, yet ever and anon he started and listened, with his wild eyes glaring upon the windows, as if he still heard the voice of his victim in the storm.

The clock struck nine.

On hearing it, he started again, saying:

"Hayhurst promised to come and stay with me tonight, but the storm keeps him back. Oh, Heaven——"

"Master, never you fear, now. No storm never kept old Mr. Hayhurst away. There! what did I tell you? There's his knock now!" exclaimed the servant, starting up with a grin on his face, overjoyed at the certainty of having a companion to share his weird night watch.

"Admit him, admit him at once!" commanded his master, with eagerness in every tone and gesture.

The servant went and opened the door, and the farmer walked in and went up to the bedside of the patient, saying, kindly:

"I hope to find you better, sir?"

"Better! better! how can I be better when her avenging spirit walks the earth and floats in the air?"

"Tut, tut, tut! Sick fancies, sir."

"Sick fancies! You yourself both saw and heard her!"

"A dream! An optical illusion at worst!"

"Optical illusion! I tell you I have not seen her yet

this night, but she is even now shrieking and shaking at the windows to get in! Do you not hear her?"

"I hear the waterfall roar and the wind rave; but even these sounds come muffled through your manifold defenses."

"Ah! you hear them, but you do not hear her voice in them, as I do! You will stay with me to-night?"

"Certainly; I came for that purpose."

"Well, then, you do not now hear her spirit raving to get in, as I hear it; but at midnight, her time of power, you will see her enter this room, even as you saw her once before," said the guilty man, in a voice half suffocated with horror.

"Doctor," said the farmer, sitting down on the bed beside him, "I won't dispute you. I saw, as you yourself said, something strange and unaccountable, in this very room, at midnight!"

"Yes! yes, yes, yes. You did! You own it!" ejaculated the sufferer, in a succession of gasps.

"Well, now, whether a ghost, devil, dream or delusion, it is a terrible visitation for you to suffer, all alone, night after night."

"Terrible? Oh, how terrible, God only knows!"

"And you would like that the mystery should be thoroughly sifted and tested—as to whether the vision be really 'ghost, devil, dream, or delusion?'"

"Yes! yes! yes! yes! but who shall do it!"

"A few of your good friends and neighbors, hearing of your condition, and feeling deeply interested in your welfare, have braved the storm this evening, to come hither and watch with you in your chamber, to investigate this affair."

"Who are they, who are they?" asked the patient, in doubt, fear, and suspicion.

"Colonel North, Mr. Maraudey, Mr. Osborne, and Lord Starr," answered the farmer.

"Let them come—yes, let them come! Let them see the spectre, or prove it to be a creation of my brain! I know there are optical illusions; I wish this, that is killing me, were one. But it is not! it cannot be! for you also saw it! and no two persons were ever at the same time the subject of the same visual illusion!"

"Now I do not know that! that remains to be proved! It may be catching, like gaping, you know; and I may have caught it from you. But—shall I invite our friends up?"

"Oh, yes, yes; in this case, indeed, there is safety in numbers," replied the sick man, who, even since the arrival of Mr. Hayhurst, had become much calmer.

The good farmer left the room for the indicated purpose.

After the lapse of about fifteen minutes he returned, accompanied by Lord Starr, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Maraudey, and Colonel North, the last-mentioned of whom entered, muttering:

"We form a very grave and respectable committee on the ghost question, do we not?"

The gentlemen approached the bedside of the invalid, who quietly thanked them for their visit, and calmly replied to their questions in regard to his health.

"Why, he seems as sensible as any man," whispered Colonel North, in surprise, to Mr. Hayhurst.

"A reaction from excitement, sir; a lucid interval, nothing better; you will see something very different before the night is past," replied the farmer, in the same low voice.

CHAPTER XXXV.

There is the wisdom of a stern content
When Poverty can blight the just and good,
When infamy dares mock the innocent,
And cherished friends turn with the multitude
To trample:—this was ours, and we unshaken stood!

Now has descended a serener hour,
And with inconstant fortune, friends return;
Though suffering leaves the knowledge and the power
Which says:—Let scorn be not repaid with scorn.

—SHELLEY.

The visitors were then accommodated with seats on the right of the patient, in the space between the bed and the front windows, and with their faces in the direction of the door, which was just opposite to the foot of the bed.

I am thus particular in describing the relative position of the room and its occupants that the reader may better understand the spectacle that afterwards presented itself.

While the gentlemen sat there, they sought, by quiet conversation, to soothe the spirits of the sick man. And the patient had struggled successfully for self-control, for he sustained with composure his own part of the discussion; admitting that the visitation to which he was nightly subjected might be either an imposture or an optical illusion; but confessing that in the present shattered condition of his health he had not nerve enough, at the hour of its arrival, to investigate the true nature of the apparition.

Thus rationally and composedly he conversed until the clock struck ten, when he started, shuddered, and sank into silence.

A gloomy silence and a semi-darkness prevailed. The

lamps, for want of trimming, burned dimly; the fire had nearly died out; the visitors, under some depressing spell, had ceased to converse; and the patient had sunk into a half-stupid state.

Thus they remained until the clock struck eleven. At the sound the man upon the bed shivered through his whole frame, half started, and then fell back and relapsed into stupor.

The next hour was one of intense anxiety—almost of suspended animation—to the watchers in the chamber. As the minute hand of the mantel clock crept its weary round, the very ticking of the pendulum sounded preternaturally loud and ominous.

Without the storm had raged itself to rest.

Within, the watchers had dropped into total silence; the fire was entirely out; the lamps were burning with long wicks, and red, lurid flames, that only served to make "darkness visible."

The watchers waited in total silence and with almost breathless interest. What would be the issue of this midnight vigil? Would the apparition, so well attested by Mr. Hayhurst, again make its appearance? Would it prove to be an imposture that they could examine, handle, and unmask; or an optical illusion, visible only to the sick brain of a credulous man? or would it be——? Who could tell?

Suddenly, out of the deep silence, the clock commenced to strike. Between it and the sufferer on the bed there seemed to be an electric connection, for, with its first vibrating stroke, again his frame shivered from head to foot, though he did not as yet awake; but at each slow, successive stroke, his form shuddered as under the charge of a galvanic battery.

As the last stroke of twelve rang solemnly through the darkening room, he suddenly sprang up in a sitting pos-

ture, broad awake, with his long arms extended, and his glaring eyes fixed upon the closed door at the foot of his bed. His frame was no longer convulsed, but rigid as marble; his face was livid as that of a corpse; his mouth was open; his eyes almost bursting from their sockets; great drops of sweat started from his pallid brow, from which his dark hair bristled up with horror.

"This is a fit," whispered Colonel North to Mr. Osborne, as they gazed in consternation upon the sufferer; and both cautiously arose to go to his assistance, when Mr. Maraudey from the other side of the bed earnestly motioned them to keep still and wait the issue. Yielding to the greater knowledge and experience of the old man, the other gentlemen silently resumed their seats and watched the patient, from whose white and rigid lips low and almost inarticulate sounds were bursting.

"She is coming! She is coming! Do you not hear her?"

They listened intently, but heard nothing except the labored breathing of the stricken man.

"Hark! She is here! She is here!" he gasped once more.

Again they listened and looked, but no new sound or sight broke the stillness of the room.

"She is here! She is here! On the outside of the door!"

They looked, but the door remained quietly closed as before.

Once more they arose to approach the dying man, but the priest lifted his hand with a gesture and a look that said, "For Heaven's sake be quiet!" and they relapsed into stillness.

"There! there she is now!" shrieked the guilty man, extending his skeleton finger and fixing his starting eyes

upon the door. "Look! behold! see her! she has come to force me to confess!"

The eyes of all present followed the index of that ghastly finger, and, to their horror and amazement, they beheld—like a moonbeam in the darkness of the doorway——

The shape or shade of Alice Heath, palpable to sense as ever she appeared while living! only never living woman looked so coldly pure. Her long and flowing snow-white robe was not whiter than her still face; her fair, slender hands were crossed upon her spotless bosom; her long black hair, parted over her calm brow, flowed gracefully down upon her white drapery; her eyes were fixed in sadness upon the eyes of her destroyer, which they seemed to hold by irresistible power, magnetized to her own.

While the gaze of the watchers was yet, as it were, frozen to this awful vision, the voice of the dying man arose in shrieks:

"You see her—you all see her? It is no illusion, as they said it was! You see her! you all see her as plainly as I do, don't you?"

The appalled faces of the spectators avouched as strongly as words could speak that they did.

"She has come to me!" screamed the convulsed and agonized man—"she has come to me! she has come for justice! She will have justice! Well, she shall have it! Ha! who is that behind her? Is it the old man? What! he, too? Look! look where the dark shadow of a man stands and shakes his hand on high! Look! behold, I say!"

The watchers followed his horrid gaze, and saw only the apparition of Alice Heath, which stood still, pale, and luminous as a form of moonlight within the doorway.

"Ha! the wound across his throat has broken out afresh! I know now it is that which makes him look so

pale! How it streams with blood! How it streams! It is running down his garments! It is creeping over the floor, and curdling in pools; take care! keep out of it! or they will find the stain upon you, and say you murdered him! Away, old man! back to your grave! Why should you stretch your withered hand toward me, as if you thought I did it? You said in dying—it was Mostyn!"

"Oh, this is horrible!" said Mr. Osborne, shuddering.

Through all this raving the vision of Alice Heath remained in unaltered beauty. But now, behold a new wonder—her perfect lips parted as if an angel spoke by them in the single phrase:

"Confess and be forgiven!"

"Oh! I will! I will! You shall have justice, Alice! you and him! him also! for death is less dreadful than this horrible punishment! Hear, all men! I murdered the old man for his hoarded gold. I put on the clothes of Gerald Mostyn, not to criminate him, but to save my own garments from bloodstain, when I did the deed! I hid the clothes with the stolen will in the crevice of the rock—meaning to produce the will when it should seem safe to do so——"

"My God! my God! I thank Thee for this great deliverance!" ejaculated Mr. Osborne, in strong emotion, while Colonel North convulsively clasped his hand.

"Ha! are you satisfied now, old man?" cried the dying penitent, still addressing the unreal phantom of his own brain—"are you satisfied now? Yes! See! see! he raises his venerable hands to heaven! He bows his hoary head in token of assent—do you not note it?"

No! the amazed spectators saw nothing but a dark form lurking behind the fair, luminous vision of Alice Heath and the dying figure of her destroyer—heard noth-

ing but the astonishing confession that criminated himself and cleared the fame of Gerald Mostyn!

"There! he extends his reverend hands in benediction, and now he is gone! he is gone!" cried the sufferer gazing into vacancy; then suddenly bringing down his wild eyes, he settled them upon the fair vision that remained unchanged and visible to all, as to himself, and cried:

"Ha! Alice! you here still? So! I forget! You must have justice, too! Ah—how dark it grows!—how thick the air!—great Heaven! can this be death? Alice! you shall have justice!—give me time, Heaven!—Alice is innocent—I—I put the jewels in her trunk—to get her in my power—I—I did not mean that she should go to prison—but I could not stop the course of law!—Alice—forgive—Jesus plead—God pardon——"

The grayness of dissolution crept over the face of the dying man; his rigid form relaxed, and he fell back upon his pillow—dead.

Before either of the watchers could make a step toward the bed, their attention was startled by a new prodigy.

The fair spirit that had remained all this while unchanged, suddenly dropped her clasped hands, and fell, fainting as a living woman might fall, into the outstretched arms of Francis Heath, who sprang forward to receive her.

He raised and bore, not the shade, but the real living form of Alice Heath, to the lounge, upon which he tenderly laid her.

All was in an instant confusion, though the presence of the dead, and, perhaps, of the dying, restrained noisy demonstrations.

Dr. Heath bent anxiously over the insensible form of his bride, who, under his skillful treatment, soon breathed again, opened her sweet eyes, and looked around in surprise and fear.

"Be calm, dear one; there is no more need of concealment. Trust me, and lie quietly, while I give our friends here one word of explanation," said Francis Heath, arranging her pillow. And then turning to the astonished and wondering spectators, he said:

"Gentlemen, a few words will explain this seeming prodigy. The apparent death of Alice in the prison, was a severe attack of catalepsy, brought on by her previous excessive suffering. When her body was given up to me for burial, I watched beside her coffin all night in my study. A little after midnight I discovered in the supposed corpse signs of life.

"In a delirium of newly-inspired hope, I lifted her from the coffin and carried her to bed, used all proper remedies, and after an hour of anxious effort, I succeeded in restoring her to consciousness. I filled her empty coffin with a muffled log, and screwed down the lid to avoid detection.

"There was a mock funeral, in that case a pious fraud, if such a thing could be.

"The next night I conveyed Alice to a safe retreat in the mountains, where I thought she would remain in peace, until I could find means to carry her to a foreign country.

"But her shattered nervous system could not soon be restored to health. Her nervous fits returned, attended with the alarming feature of somnambulism. Despite my greatest precaution, and during the time of my necessary absence, she frequently arose and walked in her sleep.

"At such seasons, the one idea of her life—the clearing of her fame—seemed to be the motive power of her unconscious action. This involuntary impulse no doubt it was that led her, night after night, to the chamber of her persecutor.

"I need not tell you, however, that while asleep, Alice is totally unconscious, and wholly irresponsible for her actions; that when awake she has no recollection of anything that has passed during her state of somnambulency, and that at this moment she is perfectly ignorant of the momentous events that have just occurred in this chamber, and to which she has been so important a party."

Then turning to Lord Starr, the young man bowed with great deference and continued:

"And I would now most respectfully suggest to the minister, that in view of all he has heard and seen to-night, his lordship can no longer hesitate as to his course in regard to two guiltless individuals most unjustly convicted."

Lord Starr bowed stiffly, with the air of one who did not choose to be prompted, and after a short delay, he arose, requested Colonel North and Mr. Osborne to attend him, and beckoned John to show him into the library, where he could be supplied with lights and writing materials.

Francis Heath seated himself beside the couch of his young wife, who, under his soothing hands, had sunk into a sweet, natural sleep.

The Catholic priest, Maraudey, knelt at the foot of the bed to pray for the soul of the departed, while Farmer Hayhurst, standing on the right side, closed the eyes, tied up the chin, and straightened the limbs of the body.

The next morning Lord Starr, attended by Colonel North, set out for London. As soon as the two pardons could pass the seals of office, they were intrusted to Colonel North, who instantly took the express train down to Gwyn, hurried at once to the house of the sheriff, and placed the documents in his hands.

That same day Gerald and Constance, who had heard

from their friend, Francis Heath, an account of the events that had transpired at Radnor, sat side by side in the prison cell, with their hands clasped together, and their hearts filled with solemn gratitude for their own deliverance from deep affliction, but not unmixed with compassion for the sinful soul now gone to its last tremendous account.

Thus in silence they remained, until the door was opened by the sheriff, who entered, bearing a document, whose import might easily be surmised, and which had been placed in his hands by Colonel North.

After a cursory examination of the papers, the worthy officer, cordially offering his hand to the prisoner, said:

"I am happy to announce, sir, that my official relations with you are ended. Permit me to wish you much happiness in the renewed life so justly bestowed upon you."

Mr. Mostyn bowed gravely and silently, his heart being too full for speech.

"Gerald!" cried Constance, in a thrilling voice, dropping her head upon his shoulder; but for her sovereign self-control she must have fainted.

"Cheer up, madam! You have borne affliction bravely. Surely you can bear joy," said the sheriff. Then turning to Mr. Mostyn, he added:

"A carriage, sent by Colonel North, waits to convey you from the prison, sir. And the colonel desires me to request you to proceed at once to Radnor, whither he himself has gone, and where, he says, he prefers to meet you."

Mr. Mostyn, accompanied by his wife, immediately left the prison, entered the carriage, and set out for Radnor. They were met in the hall by their pastor, who cordially shook hands with both, and offered them refreshments.

"I have now to inform you, my friends, that Colonel North prays the presence of his niece and nephew in the

library," said Mr. Osborne, with a grave smile, waving his hand toward the door.

"Come, dear Constance," said Mr. Mostyn, drawing the arm of his wife within his own, and following the clergyman, who led the way from the room.

They crossed the hall and entered the sumptuous library that was situated on the same floor.

There they found Colonel North seated alone at the writing table.

As they entered, the old gentleman arose and advanced toward them, holding out both his hands; grasping in each a hand of theirs, he said, in deep emotion:

"Gerald—Constance—I can scarce hope that you will pardon me, for that I also yielded credence to the circumstantial evidence that convicted an innocent man. It will take time to prove to you how deeply I regret that error."

"An error shared by the judge, the jury, and the country, sir. We could scarce expect you to be wiser than all," replied Mr. Mostyn, gravely.

"And you pardon me?" said the old man, squeezing his hand; then turning to his niece, he inquired:

"And you, Constance?"

"Uncle, I love you," replied the sweet-lipped lady.

"See," said the old gentleman, in a lightened tone, as he turned to the center table. "I have lost no time in doing something to atone for my involuntary injustice," and taking up a document, he placed it in the hands of Gerald Mostyn, saying:

"There is an instrument of writing, Mr. Mostyn, that will put your wife in immediate possession of her fortune."

Gerald, with a grave and silent bow, received the papers.

"Let me also remind you, Mr. Mostyn, that, as heir-at-law both of your late grandfather and your just departed

relative, you stand once more in the home of your fathers —the undisputed master of Radnor."

Gerald Mostyn started. It really had not occurred to him that he had entered upon his patrimonial estate. Now a flush of pleasure overspread his fine face.

Constance, keenly sympathizing with him, now in joy as once in sorrow, clasped his hand and smiled up into his face.

"Let me congratulate you, my friends," said Mr. Osborne, "not on your restored fortune, but on your vindicated honor."

"Congratulate me," said Gerald Mostyn, in a deep and thrilling tone, as he took the hand of his wife, and turned upon her lovely face a look of immortal love, "congratulate me upon something surer than the riches that may 'take to themselves wings and fly away,' purer than the worldly honor that the breath of an insensate multitude may give or withdraw; congratulate me on her whose 'price is above rubies,' who alone of all the world remained true to me in the hour of my utmost need, whose faith never failed me in the darkest of my days—my Constance, my bride of one morning, my wife for all eternity; above all goods congratulate me for her, as, above all blessings, for her I most thank God."

THE END.

GYPSY'S PROPHECY

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